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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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Ghani, Abdullah Discuss Next Steps in Peace Process

President Ashraf Ghani met Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation on Sunday morning at the Presidential Palace. Presidential spokesperson Sediq Sediqqi said that Abdullah briefed Ghani on his recent visit to Pakistan and talked about the next steps in the peace process. No further details about the meeting were provided. Abdullah is expected to visit India on a four-day trip from Oct. 6 as part of an outreach to build regional support for the peace talks, reports Indian media. This will be his first visit to New Delhi since the formation of the new government and he is expected to meet top officials. The trip has not been confirmed by Abdullah's office yet.



Finland: Troops Could Return from Afghanistan in Spring 2021

Finland's Defence Minister Antti Kaikkonen said their 60 soldiers currently serving in Afghanistan under NATO Resolute Support will likely be home in early 2021. In a televised interview, Kaikkonen said that the entire international operation in Afghanistan is winding down. "Of course there are question marks in the air because there is much work to be done on peace negotiation in the region. I still would not venture to describe the area as very stable, but plans are heading in this direction," he said. Finnish troops can be back as early as Spring 2021, he said. In July, the minister had said there were no plans to withdraw the troops in the near future. He had said that the decision to bring troops home would be tied to developments in Afghanistan, and he had not seen any improvement. In Sunday's interview however, Kaikkonen said that all international operation in Afghanistan were ending their mission. Finland has been part of the crisis management operations in Afghanistan since the early 2000s.

AIHRC: 945 Civilians Killed, Wounded in Targeted Assassinations This Year



The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) expressed concern about the increase in the targeted killing of civilians across the country. In a statement released on Sunday, the AIHRC said their findings showed that in the first six months of this year, 533 people were killed and 412 were injured in systematic and targeted

assassinations. "News of targeted attacks on activists, government officials, religious scholars and other civilians every day. This has created an environment of anxiety and fear, at the time when we most need to engage, mobilize, raise our voices and shape our peace process. Extremely worrying," tweeted AIHRC

chairperson Shaharazad Akbar. The rights commission found that in Kandahar alone, 122 civilians, including seven women were killed from Feb. 19 to Sep. 20, 2020. Another 73 people have been wounded. "The targeted killing and civilian casualties continue to rage on despite the commencement of intra-Afghan peace talks," the AIHRC said.

They once again called on all parties to the war in Afghanistan to respond to the United Nation's repeated requests to reduce civilian casualties. The continuing violence and bloody attacks are in "stark contrast to the current peace process" the commission said.

They called on the government to take practical steps to ensure better security for all citizens, especially religious minorities, religious scholars, human rights defenders and civil activists.

Reports of targeted attacks in Kabul and Baghlan

On Sunday morning, the capital was shaken with the news that two government employees were assassinated by unknown gunmen in PD16 of Kabul.

Family friends later confirmed that Said Nazif, a prosecutor for the Ministry of Defence was killed along with another colleague in the Tank-e Charaki area.

An SUV carrying an Access to Information Commission (AIC) employee was also targeted by a magnetic mine in the Hewad Wall area of PD8.

Commissioner Hamdullah Arbab survived the explosion and was uninjured. However, his driver was critically wounded and succumbed to his injuries in the hospital. ... **P3**

Foreign conspiracy behind rising violence: Karzai

Rising violence in the country amid intra-Afghan peace talks is a foreign conspiracy to scuttle the negotiations, says former President Hamid Karzai. He voiced his deep shock at Saturday's suicide car bombing in the Ghanikhel district of eastern Nangarhar province, where 15 people were killed and more than 30 others wounded.

While calling for the prosecution of perpetrators, Karzai urged all parties to the war to frustrate external plots to impede progress in the ongoing peace parleys.

"Both sides should use all their might to make the negotiations ... **P2**



U.S., Allies Disturbing Peace in Afghanistan

Those who disrupt peace in Afghanistan are the United States and its allies in the region while Iran's policy is focused on promoting peace in the war-torn country, a lawmaker said.

"Experts agree that the people of Afghanistan are suffering various problems and calamities as a result of [the intervention] of foreigners, including the U.S.," Abbas Moqtadaei, deputy chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, told ICANA.

He made the statement in response to recent remarks by American negotiator on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who had accused Iran of trying to impede U.S. peace efforts. Afghanistan has been engaged in a civil war with the Taliban since the U.S. overthrew the insurgent group from power in 2001.

In February, the U.S. and the Taliban signed a peace agreement in Doha,



Qatar, based on which Washington agreed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, and Taliban pledged to enter talks with the Afghan government.

U.S.-brokered peace talks between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban finally opened in Doha on Sept. 12, where the two warring sides sat face-to-face for the first time.

Nevertheless, the negotiations reached an impasse due to disagreements over a framework for talks, while violence between Taliban fighters and Afghan government forces continued even during the negotiations.

Khalilzad had alleged that Iran is trying to scupper the agreement to keep the U.S. bogged down in its longest war. ... **P2**

U.S., Allies...

"Iran would like to keep us entangled in a conflict without winning or losing, but paying a high price in Afghanistan until there is an agreement between the U.S. and Iran," he had asserted, referring to the conflict between Tehran and Washington over the 2015 nuclear deal.

Moqtadaei stressed that Iran's policy on Afghanistan involves efforts to establish peace and security since it complements peace efforts across the whole region.

"Foreign [non-regional] countries don't have any sympathy for this region's people and seek to reap more benefits while Iran's purpose is to help the people of the region," he said.

According to Khalilzad, the U.S. had offered to meet Iranian officials to discuss the Afghan issue.

"They should join various [forums] where we are there and they are there, to discuss the future of Afghanistan," he said. The Iranian lawmaker said Iran never interferes in its neighbors' domestic affairs but supports peace processes and cooperation among their political groups.

"The peace process in Afghanistan should continue through domestic dialogue without the intervention of Americans," he said.

Foreign...

a success and thus bring peace and security to our people," the ex0president said in a statement.

Karzai prayed to Allah to shower His eternal blessings on the martyrs and grant their bereaved families patience. He also wished the wounded a speedy recovery.

By Borhan Osman

Whose Islam? The New Battle for Afghanistan

As the major warring parties in Afghanistan sit down for peace talks in Doha, Qatar, an old, unresolved debate is emerging as the central question: What should be the role of Islam in Afghanistan? A humid seaside resort on the Persian Gulf, where the delegates are gathered, has become the unlikely venue for a search for answers acceptable to most Afghans. The Taliban, who fought for decades to establish an Islamic political system, struck a deal with the United States in February that calls for American troop withdrawals conditioned on the Taliban engaging in peace talks and promising not to allow the country to be used by transnational terrorists. They started the peace talks on Sept. 12, aware of the difficulty of persuading other Afghans and the international community to accept their understanding of Islam. The Taliban also seem to have reached a conclusion internally that their 1990s model of government is not tenable today.

When the Taliban seized territory across Afghanistan in the 1990s, the group founded a new "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," but they consulted almost none of the country's diverse political and religious groups. The result was a style of government which enforced at gunpoint the norms and lifestyles of rural southern Afghanistan on the entire country. Imposing an extremely austere lifestyle on Afghans, banning women from work and education and ignoring the pleas of the international community, turned the Taliban into an international pariah.

Establishing an "Islamic system," of governance is now the thrust of the Taliban's demands as it negotiates with

Afghan officials and representatives of the political opposition. But the Taliban need to clearly detail their ideas about the role of Islam in society and governance.

The country already has a constitution that holds Islamic jurisprudence above all other laws. Afghan officials consider the character of their system sufficiently Islamic. Their emphasis in the peace talks is on protecting the gains of the last two decades, including women's rights, freedom of expression and electoral democracy. If peace is going to result from these talks, those two perspectives on what Islamic governance in Afghanistan looks like will need to be reconciled. What is it about the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that the Taliban reject so vehemently? The Taliban say the current system was created under the shadow of Western military forces, caters mainly to Western norms and gives an insufficient role to religious authorities.

I have interviewed members of the Taliban and its leadership over many years. They see the Kabul government elites as secularists who seek to Westernize Afghan society. Instead, they see the active promotion of Islamic values and morals in society as one of the primary functions of a "true Islamic government."

In my interviews, the Taliban cited as un-Islamic the absence of gender segregation in the current Afghan public sphere; they see the relatively free Afghan media as encouraging "moral corruption," and they object to the banking system designed on international rules and want Islamic banking. They want a greater role for religious leaders in policy and lawmaking and greater promotion of

religious education.

Many Afghans fear that the Taliban favor a return to their heavy-handed rule of the late 1990s. It is true that the Taliban are uncomfortable with the liberalizing society — with degrees of freedom of expression, lack of gender segregation and Westernizing influences — that has flourished in some parts of Afghanistan in recent years.

But there are hints emerging from Taliban ranks that they could be influenced by public opinion, perhaps allowing room for compromise. For instance, the Taliban now allow schools for girls in areas under their control where there is strong popular demand. It is a break from their strict rules restricting education for women during their earlier rule.

The Taliban banned technology and communications during their earlier rule. They have since become pretty proficient users of the internet and mobile phone technology, and, in some areas the group controls today, when local elders petitioned for their community's internet access the Taliban granted it and guarded the telecommunications towers.

The Taliban seem to understand that they need to go further than tolerating girls' education. Last month, Hibatullah Akhunkzada, the leader of the Taliban, deputed Mawlawi Abdul Hakim, the movement's senior most religious scholar, to lead the Taliban negotiators in Doha. Mr. Hakim has no experience in political negotiations, but the personal involvement of such an authoritative religious figure seems to suggest that the Taliban intend to clarify their positions on the role of Islam in governance after the actual negotiations start, and that they will

want to convince Taliban fighters that any agreement signed by the group's leaders will uphold Islamic values.

I have gleaned from conversations with Taliban officials recently that they have certain positions for the negotiations, but they have not nailed down a definitive vision of what they will agree to, leaving the specifics to evolve during talks. The Taliban cite the composition of their delegation for the intra-Afghan talks — it includes a deputy leader, the senior most religious figure and over 60 percent of its most authoritative body, the leadership council — as evidence of their seriousness about reaching a deal with their rivals.

A compromise on the state system will most likely require drafting a new constitution for the country. President Ashraf Ghani has already offered the Taliban the opportunity to amend the current constitution, but only through the existing constitution's amendment procedures, which would give the government control over the process. Afghan opposition political figures and groups have signaled their willingness to consider structural reforms to the current constitutional order while preserving protections for civil and political rights.

Significant questions remain: Would the Taliban accept elections? Would they accept a coalition government? An elected parliament? In recent weeks, the Taliban leaders have revealed that they envision a religious authority at the apex of a future Afghan government — if not the chief executive position, then a body with power to oversee the executive.

Peace negotiations will be strained on questions such as the Taliban's refusal to accept the ...

P3

By Arash Yaqin

Does America Side with Pakistan or Afghanistan?

Senior Afghan officials, Afghan journalists and social media users responded angrily to Asif's comment and accused him and Pakistan's military establishment of showing open support for the Taliban. Waheed Omar, a strategic adviser to President Ashraf Ghani, responded to Mr. Asif's tweet by writing: "The same guy you think has Khoda (God) with him, was being tortured in a Pakistani jail when you were Minister of Defense. No? When you were Minister, TTP massacred 140 kids in an Army Public School. Was Khoda with them, too?"

Amid this bloody rivalry between the two countries, the question many ask is: Whose side do the Americans stand on?

In order to answer this question, is essential to review the AFPAC (Afghanistan-Pakistan) antagonism which is rooted in historical territorial disputes. The hostility between two countries goes back to 1947 when the Afghan government denied the validity of the colonial Durand Line, which now serves as a de facto border between the nations. Afghanistan was the only country that voted against Pakistan's recognition as a state in

the UN forum. The following Afghan governments and regimes including the Taliban always denied the Durand Line. In addition, starting from the 1960's, Afghan leaders have openly supported the idea of an independent Pashtunistan by encouraging Pashtun tribal nationalists, and Pashtun separatist movements like PTM (Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement), to use them as a form of pressure against Islamabad. Some scholars and non-Pashtun politicians in Afghanistan argue that while the Durand Line is already recognized as international boundary, the Pashtunistan debate and Durand Line have been used by some Afghan Pashtun leaders, to win "Pashtun ethnic support" and electoral votes.

On the other side, Pakistan has been intimately involved in the four decades of Afghan conflict and keeps interfering in Afghan matters: first by unofficially backing the Mujahideen, and now the Taliban. Many believe that even if the Taliban reaches a peace with the Afghan government, Pakistan will keep interfering in Afghanistan affairs, first because of the Durand Line and secondly because of the close relations

between Afghanistan and India. Pakistani authorities accuse Afghan leaders of letting India use Afghan soil for a social-economic proxy war against Pakistan. For instance, India's plan to invest in a multi-million-dollar water dam project on the Kabul River, was, in Pakistani eyes, seen as a move in a proxy war against Pakistan. The Pakistanis believe that the implementation of the project could directly lead to a water shortage in Pakistan.

But what about the United States? Many Afghans believe that the United States is still a close ally of Pakistan's because the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supports Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) activities, and the US government supports Pakistan with financial aid. Although there is no doubt that the CIA during the Cold War was involved in establishing regional security agencies, including SAVAK in Iran and ISI in Pakistan, to counter the Soviets and communism, nevertheless, from a broader US foreign policy perspective, Pakistan has never been a long-term partner with the United States, as many Afghans wrongly believe. Pakistan has been used by the United States more as

a temporary proxy partner during the Cold War as a containment wall against the Soviet Union and later as a supply chain route for NATO troops since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002.

Although Pakistan has the same status as Afghanistan as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) with the US, and also has the strategic Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States, the relation between the US and Pakistan over the past 75 years has been subject to a turbulent partnership. The war in Afghanistan led many American politicians, including top US military and diplomats, to openly criticize Pakistan's failure to take up a role in fighting terrorism. As a result, the security assistance to Pakistan became a target for critics of US foreign policy, which led President Trump to minimize its funding. With President Trump's new South Asia strategy, the US has prioritized its relationship with India and further reduced Pakistan's security assistance. His administration also cut the financial aid to the Pakistani government for their role in backing terrorism. The Foreign Military Sales (FMS) relationship has

been reduced almost completely as Pakistan shifts toward Chinese and Russian markets for their military equipment. Last, but not least, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an integral part of the Chinese Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), has led Islamabad to seek closer ties with Beijing than Washington.

Therefore, this entire idea that Pakistan is a closer ally to the United States than Afghanistan is based on deception. Islamabad is an outdated strategic partner for Washington and has no value for US foreign policy in South and Central Asia. In addition, Americans spent \$822 billion in Afghanistan in only 19 years, and close to 2,500 American service members lost their lives in protecting Afghanistan and the Afghan government from the Taliban. Pakistan receives almost nothing from the US, but Afghanistan's national budget largely depends on American assistance.

It's true that the United States recognized Pakistan one day after its establishment in 1947, and thus also recognized the current perimeter of the Durand Line (DL) as an official international ...

P3

Govt: '90%' of Pledges to Intl Donors Fulfilled

The Afghan government has fulfilled 'almost 90 percent' of its commitments made to international partners in order to secure continued assistance, the acting minister of finance, Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, said on Saturday. Arghandiwal said the Afghan government is confident it will convince the international community in the upcoming Geneva Conference on Afghanistan to continue its assistance to Afghanistan. "We will go to the conference with accomplishments and we will convince members of the conference to continue supporting Afghanistan, in view of the current circumstances," said Arghandiwal. But members of Afghan parliament and the private sector have said that the government has not managed to

act upon its stated policies in terms of facilitating investments, reducing corruption and increasing national revenues. "The Afghan government failed to take advantage of the assistance over the past several years, it also failed to fulfill the commitments it made to the international community," said Sakhi Ahmad Paiman, deputy head of the Chamber of Commerce of Afghanistan. "The commitments that are made by the government officials have not been implemented," said Yousuf Mohmand, an Afghan investor. The Government of Afghanistan, Finland and the United Nations are co-hosting the 2020 Afghanistan Conference on November 23-24 in Geneva. The 2020 Afghanistan Conference is



a milestone event in Afghanistan's journey to peace, prosperity and self-reliance. The aim of the conference is to renew international and Afghan commitments to the development and stability of Afghanistan, to agree to joint development goals for 2021-24 and to coordinate development cooperation regarding financial support for Afghanistan.

Whose Islam?...

current share of women's participation in public service. Without the Taliban agreeing to a compromise on individual rights and freedoms, an agreement won't be reached.

In fact, the Taliban's positions and attitudes stem from Afghan cultural norms as much as they do Islamic doctrine, which influences them in both strongly conservative and relatively progressive directions. The socially conservative views the Taliban espouse are common among rural Afghans, as well as a substantial share of urban educated youth.

Unlike other modern jihadist groups, the Taliban are not fixated on a literalist reading of textual sources. Their movement was born out of a combination of Islamic oral tradition and pre-Islamic cultural norms, and does not have a single ideological document. In fact, that absence of a definitive intellectual foundation in the Taliban has driven some of its more educated radicalized youth to join rival groups such as the Islamic State in Afghanistan. The absence of core, rigid ideological texts might enable the Taliban to integrate into mainstream Afghan politics. There are many in Afghanistan who are deeply skeptical about genuine change in the Taliban and the prospect of future transformation. But there are no easier ways to test and build on those possibilities than through political engagement in the context of ongoing peace negotiations.

The evolution of the Taliban's political thinking, though, is likely to be slow. Rushing the negotiations would risk producing an unstable result that only papers over the two sides' differences; successful negotiations will require not only patience but also a more hands-off approach from other governments than they are usually comfortable with.

The shaping of the post-Taliban Afghanistan by the Western governments, primarily the United States, eventually turned out to be its vulnerability and undermined its legitimacy in the eyes of many Afghans. A new dispensation in Afghanistan will need the support of conservative elements of Afghan society if we want the long war in the country to finally be over.

Does America...

boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As American scholar and former US State Department official Barnett Rubin recently mentioned on Twitter: "The US recognized DL as the international boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan and has told Afghans that if there is a border dispute, it should be resolved peacefully between the two countries."

When it comes to the Durand Line, the United States is not the only country that recognized the DL as an international boundary. Therefore, this should not be considered a sign of American preference of Pakistan over Afghanistan. This fiction that the United States stands closer to Pakistan than Afghanistan is played up by Pakistani establishment to show American support for their cause, and by the corrupt Kabul elites who want to take attention away from themselves and let Afghans continue to focus on Pakistan. The fact that Kabul blames Pakistan for everything is an Afghan weakness; it does not mean that Pakistan has regional supremacy.

Ironically, most of those Afghan elites who blame Pakistan for every aspect of Afghan insecurity have for decades been guests at the Pakistani military establishment's dinner table to fight ISI wars in Afghanistan during the Cold War. This includes Mr. Hikmatyar, Mr. Sayaf, former President Karzai, Ahmad Sha Massoud's followers, and, in some ways, President Ashraf Ghani himself, who, as an American citizen, was a Fulbright scholar in Pakistan to strengthen the US-Pakistan relationship. Everyone now blames Pakistan while they

personally contributed to Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan.

However, the Afghans should worry about its internal affairs rather than on Pakistan-US relationship. The world, including American policymakers, already knows that the Pakistani ISI establishment supports terrorism for the sake of its own survival. Like Afghanistan, Pakistan is an isolated country dealing with internal power struggles and domestic terrorist threats from the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group. Finally, the recent strategic partnership between Washington and New Delhi has closed all doors between Pakistan and the United States. Pakistan also made its choice by joining China's side in the Great Power Competition.

While the majority of Afghans are debating about Pakistan, Afghanistan's young democracy, unfortunately, stands at the crossroads of darkness, at risk of falling back into the Taliban period or another civil war, if the intra-Afghan negotiations don't deliver a peace accord. Therefore, instead of spending time on each foreign comment and losing weeks about a single Twitter post, Afghans should use their time wisely and not run behind what others say, especially while their own destiny is being decided in Doha by the Trump administration, who upgraded the Taliban status to almost that of a legitimate government. The Taliban legitimacy is not only supported by the Americans, but also by others in the international community, including the European Union, who are tired of two decades of corruption and

the incompetence of Afghan leadership.

In conclusion, it is recommended that Afghan politicians, journalists, and social media users put aside their anti-Pakistani sentiments and instead focus on the Taliban, the corruption within the Afghan government, and becoming engaged with the Afghan peace talks, which will determine the future of Afghanistan. Once the peace agreement with the Taliban has succeeded—and we all hope it will—the next step must be ending the Durand Line debate and not postponing it for another decade by moving the problem to the next generation of Afghans. While many countries in that part of the world have become emergent world economies, Afghanistan-Pakistan hostility has led both nations to now sit at the table with terrorists. The young generations of both countries should have the right to live in peaceful conditions near each other.

Arash Yaqin, an Afghan native who fled the Afghan civil war and lived as ex-refugee in Russia and Europe for two decades. In Kabul, he worked as a UN capacity-building advisor for the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. Then for three years, he worked as senior cultural affairs advisor for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, where he managed the Fulbright Exchange Program. In 2016 he moved to the United States where he is pursuing his M.A. degree in Statecraft and National Security Affairs at the Institute of World Politics in Washington, D.C. His focus is Counter Violent Extremism and the Great Power Competition in South and Central Asia.

AIHRC: 945...

Baghlan's Jalga district Governor Abdul Wali Sharifi and his three bodyguards were also wounded in an ambush by unknown gunmen in the Kotal Morgh area of Deh Salah district on Saturday.

Baghlan Police spokesperson Ahmad Javed Basha told

Reportedly that the men had been travelling to Pule-Khumri when they were attacked.

On Saturday morning, Maidan Shar Mayor Zarifa Ghafari also survived an ambush attempt in the Arghandi area while traveling from Kabul to Wardak province.

Ghafari said three masked gunmen tried to stop her car at 9:40 a.m. but her driver raced past them and thwarted the attack. She was uninjured, however, her car was badly damaged by the bullets.

No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attacks yet.

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US push for Arab-Israel ties divides Sudanese leaders

Sudan's fragile interim government is sharply divided over normalizing relations with Israel, as it finds itself under intense pressure from the Trump administration to become the third Arab country to do so in short order — after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Washington's push for Sudan-Israel ties is part of a campaign to score foreign policy achievements ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November.

Sudan seemed like a natural target for the pressure campaign because of U.S. leverage — Khartoum's desperate efforts to be removed from a U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism. Sudan can only get the international loans and aid that are essential for reviving its battered economy once that stain is removed.

While Sudan's transitional government has been negotiating the terms of removing the country from the list for more than a year, U.S. officials

introduced the linkage to normalization with Israel more recently.

Top Sudanese military leaders, who govern jointly with civilian technocrats in a Sovereign Council, have become increasingly vocal in their support for normalization with Israel as part of a quick deal with Washington ahead of the U.S. election.

"Now, whether we like it or not, the removal (of Sudan from the terror list) is tied to (normalization) with Israel," the deputy head of the council, Gen. Mohammed Dagalo, told a local television station on Friday.

"We need Israel ... Israel is a developed country and the whole world is working with it," he said. "We will have benefits from such relations ... We hope all look at Sudan's interests."

Such comments would have been unthinkable until recently in a country where public hostility toward Israel remains strong.



The top civilian official in the coalition, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, has argued that the transitional government does not have the mandate to decide on foreign policy issues of this magnitude. When U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Sudan last month, Hamdok urged him to move forward with removing Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and

not link it to recognizing Israel. "It needs a deep discussion within our society," Hamdok told reporters earlier this week. Several Sudanese officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media, said civilian leaders prefer to wait with any deal until after the U.S. election.

A look at the world

Trump says he 'feels better' after COVID-19 treatment

U.S. President Donald Trump, who is being treated for COVID-19 in a military hospital outside Washington, D.C., said in a video on Saturday that he was feeling ill when he arrived at the facility but now feels better. Trump, looking tired and wearing a suit coat but no tie, said in a video released on his Twitter, "I'm starting to feel good." He added that "over the next period of a few days I guess that's the real test. We'll be seeing what happens over those next couple of days."

Trump was hospitalized Friday evening



after experiencing a low-grade fever, chills, nasal congestion and cough, multiple sources with direct knowledge of the matter tell ABC News.

His doctor said in an update on Saturday night that the medical team is "cautiously optimistic" on the president's health condition. "President Trump continues to do well, having made substantial progress since diagnosis," White House doctor Sean P. Conley said in a statement. "While not yet out of the woods, the team remains cautiously optimistic," the doctor added. Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will depart for Japan on Sunday but will not go to Mongolia and South Korea as originally planned, the State Department said on Saturday, after Trump was diagnosed and hospitalized due to COVID-19.

The 74-year-old president has a mild fever though, according to a source familiar with the matter. Conley said earlier in a new memo that he is "fatigued but in good spirits" as of Friday afternoon.

Jordan's King Abdullah accepts prime minister's resignation



Jordan's King Abdullah II has accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz but asked him to stay on in a caretaker capacity until he designates a successor to oversee parliamentary elections in November, according to local media.

The monarch dissolved Parliament last Sunday at the end of its four-year term, in a move that under constitutional rules meant the government had to resign within a week.

"As I accept your resignation, I instruct you and the government to continue working until a prime minister is chosen and the new government is formed," the king was quoted as saying by the al-Ghad news outlet in a statement, stressing "the need to work with vigour, determination and perseverance during this period because of the coronavirus pandemic".

"Dealing with the virus means taking continuous action and making decisions [regarding it] without delay."

To date, the country has registered 14,479 coronavirus cases and 88 related deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. In recent weeks, the government has been widely criticised for failing to contain a surge in the number of COVID-19 infections. King Abdullah appointed al-Razzaz prime minister in the summer of 2018 to defuse the biggest protests in years against tax increases sought by the International Monetary Fund to reduce Jordan's large public debt.

Observers say a wider shake-up and a new assembly after the November 10 vote could help ease popular disenchantment about economic hardships worsened by the impact of COVID-19 and limits on civil and political freedoms under emergency laws.

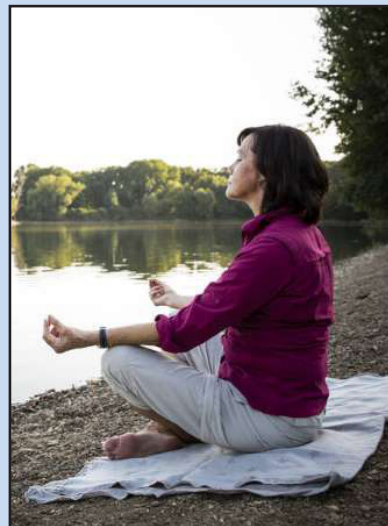
Jordan's economy is expected to shrink by 6 percent in 2010 as it tackles its worst economic crisis in many years, with unemployment and poverty aggravated by the pandemic.

Jordan, which is hosting more than 650,000 Syrian refugees, remains heavily reliant on foreign aid. Historically, prime ministers have been appointed for as little as one month or as long as three years, mainly to enact specific laws or resolve domestic or regional crises, after which they were dismissed.

Mindful yoga and meditation 'can help with chronic pain'

A new study has found that 89 per cent of participants who took part in a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course reported improved levels of pain and depression.

"Many people have lost hope because, in most cases, chronic pain will never fully resolve," says Cynthia Marske, an osteopathic physician at the Community Health Clinics of Benton and Linn County. "However, mindful yoga and meditation can help improve the structure and function of the body,



which supports the process of healing." The study took place in Oregon, and over the course of eight weeks, participants were given "intensive instruction" in mindfulness meditation and mindful hatha yoga.

While Dr. Marske is keen to emphasise the difference between healing and curing chronic pain, the findings do show alternative paths should be explored.

"Curing means eliminating disease, while healing refers to becoming more whole," Dr. Marske explained. "With chronic pain, healing involves learning to live with a level of pain that is manageable. For this, yoga and meditation can be very beneficial.

"The bottom line is that patients are seeking new ways to cope with chronic pain and effective non-pharmaceutical treatments are available. Our findings show meditation and yoga can be a viable option for people seeking relief from chronic pain."



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