

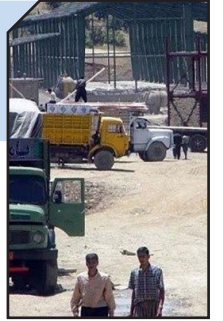
Page 2 | NATIONAL
Afghan Peace: Illusion and Reality

Uzbekistan is upbeat on Afghan trade and development

In his speech before the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 23 (held by videoconference due to ...)

Page 3 | ECONOMY

Illegal Import of Goods to Afghanistan on the Rise



Kabul
20 / 8



Herat
25 / 9



Nangarhar
33 / 18



Balkh
25 / 11



Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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10 afs



Kabul hails Iran's strong stance on Afghanistan's peace procedure

The Political Deputy for Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Mirwais Nab hailed Iran's hospitality in hosting Afghan refugees and appreciated Tehran's strong stance in supporting the peace process under the leadership of the Kabul government.

Speaking in the opening of the joint border commission on Sunday evening, Nab said the session that was held after seven years was a valuable step for the expansion of cooperation and solving some problems.

He wanted both countries' delegations to use the friendly and positive atmosphere in different fields to reach a new and effective agreement.

Expressing happiness for holding the meeting, Iran's Ambassador in Kabul Bahador Aminian said the meeting will discuss the most necessary and the most practical parts of the relations ... **P2**



Khalilzad again meets peace negotiators in Doha

US special envoy for Afghanistan peace Zalmay Khalilzad has once again met with the government and Taliban negotiators in Qatar.

The meetings come as no meeting could happen between the government and the Taliban negotiating teams in Doha over the past two weeks.

Dr. Talib, a member of the government team, told Pajhwok Afghan News that Khalilzad held a meeting with the government peace team late on Sunday. He said the meeting focused on obstacles to the start of intra-Afghan talks, ceasefire and reduction in violence. Another member of the team, who declined to be named, told Pajhwok that all government negotiators were present in the meeting with Khalilzad.

The source said Khalilzad told them that he had met Taliban negotiators as well and called on both sides to end the deadlock and start talks.

"Khalilzad emphasized that both sides are Afghans and they should resolve their problems themselves and the US will not interfere," the peace ... **P2**

Helmand attacks against U.S.-Taliban pact: Gen. Miller



U.S.-Forces Afghanistan spokesman Colonel Sonny Leggett confirms American forces have conducted several targeted strikes in Helmand over the past two days to defend Afghan National Defense and Security Forces who have come under attack by the Taliban. In a series of tweets, he said

this was in accordance with the U.S.-Taliban agreement and that USFOR-A has and will continue to provide support in defense of the ANDSF under attack by the Taliban. U.S.-Forces Afghanistan Commander, General Scott Miller said: "The Taliban need to immediately stop their offensive

actions in Helmand Province and reduce their violence around the country. It is not consistent with the US-Taliban agreement and undermines the ongoing Afghan Peace Talks."

This announcement comes amid intense fighting in the southern province which started on Saturday

night when the Taliban launched coordinated attacks on a number of areas.

Since then hundreds of residents, in various districts and in the provincial capital Lashkargah have fled their homes.

Late Monday morning, President Ashraf Ghani assured Helmand's governor, General Mohammad Yasin Khan, of the full support of the Afghan security forces amid escalating violence in the province. In a phone conversation with Yasin Khan on Monday, Ghani told the governor he has ordered military institutions to take serious steps to support Helmand.

Yasin Khan said on his Facebook page that "His Excellency the President conveyed his best wishes to the people of Helmand and assured them of the full attention of the Central Government, saying that an attack on Helmand would be very difficult for the enemies of the country."

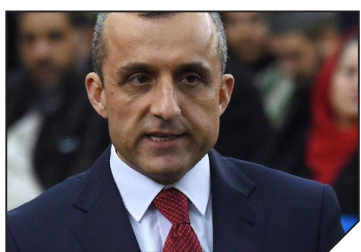
Yasin Khan said he briefed Ghani on the security situation and was assured he has government's full cooperation. ... **P3**

Saleh: Taliban Consider Ceasefire as Their 'Political Death'

First Vice President Amrullah Saleh said the Taliban is continuing their bloodshed and indiscriminate killings as they consider a ceasefire to be their "political death."

Writing on Facebook on Monday, Saleh said the main reason for the increase in the Taliban's "absurd and bloody attacks" was the misunderstanding of the group, revealing their "ignorance" regarding the political developments in and around Afghanistan.

"The Taliban are underestimating the national will and have launched many attacks with the wrong perception of the peace process," Saleh writes. ... **P3**



U.S. Drawdown Remains Conditions-Based: Milley

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley in an interview with NPR airing Monday morning, said that U.S. drawdown plans are conditions-based.

"We have a plan, a series of responsible drawdown options that has been briefed to the president. I'm not going to go into specific numbers for the future," he said.

"But we have a responsible plan to end the war with U.S. interests clearly in mind. As you know, we the United States government signed an agreement on 28 February," he said. He also pointed that at that time of the deal the U.S. had around 12,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

"That came down to, call it 8,500, 8,600 or so by mid summer, and we're on a plan to do a responsible, deliberate drawdown to about 4,500 here very shortly. And then future drawdowns will be determined by the president. And I'm not going to



disclose specific numbers and what those are. The whole agreement and all of the drawdown plans are conditions-based, and I expect that we'll have further discussions on the conditions and ensure that they warrant," he further said.

"The key here is that we're trying to end a war responsibly, deliberately, and to do it on terms that guarantee the safety of the U.S. vital national

security interests that are at stake in Afghanistan," he mentioned.

Asked if "conditions-based" meant that the drawdown timetable may always be subject to conditions on the ground, so that the mission isn't endangered, Milley answered:

"Well, that has always been our instructions. That's always been the agreement. That was the decision of the president on a ... **P3**

Kabul hails...

between the two neighboring countries. He hoped that the meeting would be able to solve a big part of the problems that impede border trade. He went on to say that more serious issues, such as drug and human trafficking, should be considered as well.

Fauci says...

from a nationally broadcast television interview in which Dr. Fauci was praising the work of the Trump administration. The words spoken are accurate, and directly from Dr. Fauci's mouth. How have Fauci and Trump clashed before? The doctor has been a key member of the White House task force on coronavirus but he has found himself having to clarify or question some of the president's assertions on the epidemic. In April, Mr. Trump retweeted a #FireFauci hashtag but then insisted the doctor was doing a great job.

Khalilzad again...

negotiator added. He quoted Khalilzad as saying that sustainable ceasefire was impossible and reduction in violence should be agreed upon during negotiations. Khalilzad assured the Afghan delegation of his country's support and said: "You represent a republic you have achieved. The world knows you and you have to negotiate from a strong position," the source added. Taliban political office spokesman Dr. Naeem told Pajhwok that no meeting took place between the Taliban negotiating team and Khalilzad on Monday night.

By Afrasiab Khattak

Afghan Peace: Illusion and Reality

A month after the beginning of the intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, there has been little progress towards their ultimate goal of securing an agreement over Afghanistan's political future.

The parties are still dealing with technicalities including establishing ground rules for conducting the negotiations, a framework for resolving differences over contentious points and an agenda for the talks. Overall, a set of illusions appears to be masking the ugly underlying realities that cloud Afghanistan's future.

It is also not surprising that the Taliban is keen on basing the negotiations on the Doha agreement, which generously favors the group and completely bypasses the Afghan state. The agreement neither asked the insurgents to renounce violence or terrorism nor has it demanded recognition of the Afghan state, a rational part of any agreement between state and non-state actors. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, on the other hand, is referring to the framework approved by the recent inclusive Loya Jirga held in Kabul and the joint statement by the US and Afghan government about the peace process.

These disagreements are further complicated by the Taliban's reluctance to either declare a permanent ceasefire or commit to a reduction in violence. Last month, Zalmay Khalilzad, Washington's envoy for Afghan reconciliation, predicted that the Taliban would not accept a permanent ceasefire before reaching a political deal with Kabul. He had previously reiterated that a reduction in violence is required by the Doha deal. It goes without saying that growing violence can seriously derail the peace process altogether if it becomes unmanageable.

In this context, the visit of Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation, to Islamabad late last month has been significant because the Doha process is practically a sideshow in comparison to negotiations in Islamabad when it comes to decision-making by the Taliban. Its leadership is still based in Pakistan despite the group's claims about its control over the greater part of Afghanistan. But more importantly, despite public denials and claims of a course correction, Pakistan's security state has its own "way forward" for Afghanistan. Actually, the real handlers of the Taliban in Pakistan's



security establishment would have loved to host the intra-Afghan dialogue in Islamabad instead of conducting it in Doha. However, some of the civilian experts were ultimately able to persuade military leaders that it could have created the impression of an effort to impose a 'Made in Pakistan' solution. It could also have revived the unpleasant memories of the botched efforts by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) at government formation by Mujahideen groups in 1992. Pakistan has come a long way from denying the existence of Taliban sanctuaries on its soil to owning the presence of the Taliban and adopting the role of a peacemaker by claiming credit for persuading them to join talks with Washington and Kabul. This is why the Doha deal between the US and the Taliban has no mention of Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan despite the strong demand for ending these sanctuaries by US and Afghan political and military leaders for many years. This transition was also made possible by a paradigm shift in US policy towards the Taliban. Washington toppled the Taliban's emirate shortly after 9/11, after labeling the group terrorists and identifying them as part of Al-Qaeda's franchise, which planned and executed the 9/11 attacks. After nearly two decades of fighting, the US position has undergone a sea change. In the short term, the US appeasement of the Taliban seems to be guided by US President Donald Trump's election interests. His administration needs to take credit for a foreign policy success by ending what is dubbed the longest war in American history. However, in the long term, the US position on the

Taliban is part of the West's new Cold War with China, which enjoys bipartisan support in America. The Taliban, after renouncing anti-US designs with Pakistan as guarantor, can be regarded as a potential ally in the new international alignment against Beijing. By now it seems plausible that from the very beginning Washington never regarded the Taliban, unlike Al-Qaeda and a few other groups, as a real threat to the security of mainland America. Washington viewed the Taliban as a regional problem that could create difficulties for China, Russia, Iran and India. So why would the US go all the way to dismantle or eliminate the movement? This has created new space for Pakistani generals to leverage their influence in Afghanistan. In Rawalpindi, the predominantly Punjabi generals think they can secure their interests by delivering a settlement in Afghanistan. For them, Washington's push to inject the Taliban into the Afghan state system is a blessing. It is expected to strengthen the theocratic character of the Afghan state and society – a Sunni theocracy ready to counter a Shia clerical regime in neighboring Iran. Some of the 36,000 thousand madrasas operating in Pakistan will eventually extend their branches to Afghanistan (including separate seminaries for girls), which will reinforce the Talibanization of Afghanistan. Apart from its influence over the Taliban, the Pakistani security apparatus has deep old contacts among former Afghan Mujahideen leaders. Some of the Taliban and former Mujahideen leaders have large-scale investments and economic interests in ... **P3**

By NAESMI

Uzbekistan is upbeat on Afghan trade and development

In his speech before the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 23 (held by videoconference due to the global coronavirus pandemic) the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev sounded an optimistic note on Uzbekistan's burgeoning economic and trade developments with its neighbor to the south, Afghanistan. One of the most striking manifestations of the renewed external policy of Uzbekistan after the election of President Mirziyoyev in 2016 was a fundamental reformatting of relations with the bordering countries, including Afghanistan. Indeed, while speaking of Uzbekistan's ongoing process of democratic transformations and economic modernization, Mirziyoyev remarked that "over the past four years, Uzbekistan's bilateral trade with neighboring states has grown almost five-fold." The leadership of Uzbekistan has implemented a new approach by amplifying the economic vector, social development of Afghanistan and developing transport corridors. In a clear demonstration of this, the President stated that "we have started the implementation of

major infrastructure projects such as Surkan-Puli Khumri power line and construction of a railway from Mazar-i-Sharif to the sea ports of the Indian Ocean." In addition, Mirziyoyev proposed that a Regional Center for the Development of Transport and Communications be established under the auspices of the United Nations to "ensure deep integration of our region into the global economic, transport and transit corridors." Enter Afghanistan—a country that was there all along but for which the prospects for economic progress are looking brighter than ever. It is undeniable that Afghanistan and Central Asia have always influenced each other's internal development: "We see Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia," Mirziyoyev said. Although there are still many factors that can maintain internal tension and intra-Afghan confrontation, today there is also cause to look with a certain optimism at the situation in Afghanistan, as all look forward to a more integrated marketplace that will in time be conducive to the development of economic opportunities and blossoming of robust trade ties

between Kabul and Tashkent. Connectivity is key That Uzbekistan's supportive role in a renaissance of Afghanistan is a substantial one should come as no surprise given the two countries share a 144-kilometer border and broader historical links going back millennia and including the storied days of the Silk Road. Today, railroad projects have the power to not only promote transit connectivity but to encourage trade as well, with huge potential for all stakeholders concerned. The Mazar-i-Sharif railway will help Afghanistan open economic links to Chabahar Port in Iran—a gateway to Central Asia—but also to important Indian Ocean important seaports on the Pakistani coast such as Karachi, and along the Indian littoral as well. Uzbekistan is well-positioned to play a major role not only as a transit country for goods from China but also as an exporter of domestic products to Afghanistan, which will eventually function as the "land bridge" it has long been but with far greater efficiency. Shoring up Afghan infrastructure will over time attract the kind of thru-traffic to create a new engine of economic growth in the region. ... **P3**

U.S. Drawdown...

conditions-based withdrawal. And as you look at the agreement, the 28 February agreement, one of those conditions is: enter Afghan negotiations. Those are ongoing right now. That's important. Another one is not attacking U.S. forces; not conducting major attacks in the major urban areas of Afghanistan; severing ties with al-Qaida. And there's a whole variety of other conditions. So we're monitoring all of those conditions closely. And we're, we the military, are giving our best military advice on those conditions so that the president can make an informed, deliberate, responsible decision," he told NPR. He also spoke about the peace talks and the level of violence in Afghanistan. "They're not finalized, so I caveat that because they are ongoing in Doha as you know. It depends. It depends on the specific condition and it depends on how you want to measure it. In terms of violence, for example, if you start measuring the violence from, call it four or five months ago,

has there been a significant reduction in violence? Answer: not significant. If you measure it from two to three years ago or five years ago, there has been a significant reduction in violence." U.S. President Donald Trump on Twitter on Wednesday said that "We should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!" Hours after Trump's announcement, his national security adviser Robert O'Brien said Washington would reduce its forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by early next year. "Ultimately, the Afghans themselves are going to have to work out an accord, a peace agreement. ... It's going to be slow progress, it's going to be hard progress, but we think it's a necessary step – we think Americans need to come home," O'Brien told an event at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Reuters quoting him as saying. Trump and other officials have previously said the United States will go down to between 4,000 and 5,000 troops in Afghanistan around November.

Illegal Import of Goods to Afghanistan on the Rise

As trade relations is increasing between Afghanistan and Iran, illegal import of goods from Iran to Afghanistan has also increased, according to Afghanistan Chambers Federation (ACF).

The volume of the goods coming to Afghanistan through smuggling from Iran and Pakistan is equal to the level of the goods coming legally and the trend severely damaging domestic production, the ACF chief Khan Jan Alokozai said.

"Fifty percent of goods is imported legally and 50 percent illegally, not only from Iran, but also from Pakistan.

This trend puts severe implications on our economy," Alokozai added.

He said that illegal import of goods from Iran has doubled following COVID-19 outbreak.

The Afghan Ministry of Industry and Commerce said the government is taking proper measures to prevent illegal import of goods.

"We have discussed the issue with the Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs and officials at our borders and customs offices and also our business community and Ministry of Finance. We are looking to ensure the formation a committee to prevent this as soon as



possible," said Nisar Ahmad Ghoryani, nominee for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

Earlier, a number of businessmen and

members of the Chamber of Industries and Mines raised concerns about what they described as Iran's dumping policies in Afghanistan.

Saleh: Taliban...

He once again called the group a tool for "securing the interests of the neighbour" to control Afghanistan, without paying heed to the people of the nation.

"They attack like locusts and die like locusts, as if they were robots in the human body," he wrote.

Saleh claimed that there has been an upswing in popular resistance in many part of Afghanistan where Taliban violence has risen.

"The Taliban will not reap any strategic or political benefits from this bloodshed because violence as a political tool is hated and rejected," he remarked.

The first vice president also said the "unfortunately" Afghanistan will experience another crisis before the mentality based on murder and genocide is broken.

However, Saleh called the defeat of the Taliban "inevitable" because, he argues, that it is not possible to impose the Taliban method on the people and the pluralistic society of Afghanistan by force.

"The Taliban have no political agenda that the people can rely on," he states.

He stressed that even after 25 years of bearing arms, and because of "Rawalpindi's [Pakistan] greed," no central "charismatic" figure has emerged as a leader.

The Taliban lack the "charisma and charm" to lead, Saleh said and pointed that the plans of the militant group are based on keeping the society in "darkness and ignorance" so that they can secure their proxy rule.

Helmand attacks...

This comes after clashes continued through Sunday night and into Monday morning, while gun battles were reported on the outskirts of Lashkargah.

In social media posts early Monday, the Taliban's white flags were seen flying above the entrance gate into the city.

Travelers on the Helmand-Kandahar highway also reported heavy clashes along the route. Many motorists posted photographs of vehicles lined up along the route, after the road was closed overnight due to the fighting.

The governor's spokesman, Omar Zwak on Monday also confirmed an explosion had been reported close to a checkpoint in Lashkargah city, killing a child and wounding at least five others.

Afghan Peace...

Pakistan. Although Pakistani authorities have been quite harsh towards common Afghan refugees in recent times, they have allowed some of the Afghan elites to invest in business and buy big properties in Pakistan. The said contacts will come handy in cobbling together an "acceptable" coalition. The Pakistani handlers of the Taliban do not see any problem in accommodating any Afghan politicians from the north of the country, as long as they are ready to play second fiddle to the Taliban. Managing high profile Pashtun leaders with a national appeal in Afghanistan will be a problem.

To counter nationalist Afghan leaders, however, the Pakistani policy will include touting the Taliban as "representatives of Pashtuns," as a solution to the Pashtun question on both sides of the Durand Line.

The regrouping of the Taliban in the former FATA districts, simultaneous with the group's ascendancy in Afghanistan, reflects this policy. Pakistan also has a "black list" of Afghan leaders who are to be blocked from coming into power. Anyone deemed as actively standing up for Afghan national interests is on this list. Islamabad very conveniently wants to label them "pro India" to push them out of future governments.

Uzbekistan is...

At the same time, Uzbekistan will through its active participation in these projects undoubtedly continue to raise its profile as a force for positive change and sustainable development on the international stage.

Investing in energy With its well-established and sizeable power generation facilities and abundant supply of natural gas, Uzbekistan has become the largest electricity producer in Central Asia. That makes the country a natural partner for investment in Afghanistan's energy future. The power transmission line will extend some 260 kilometers from Surkhan southward to Puli Khumri— which sits 230 km north of Kabul—injecting more than a thousand megawatts of electricity into Afghanistan's power grid. Over the course of a year that amounts to up to

Pakistani intelligence agencies are quite adept at political engineering and power games in Pakistan. They will use some of that expertise in Afghan power games as well.

Pakistani movers and shakers of their country's Afghan policy have accumulated all the levers for shaping an endgame in Afghanistan. From transit trade, visas, border management to fighting Daesh, they are using all real and perceived issues as bargaining chips. They appear to be positioning themselves to break the expected impasse over a permanent ceasefire between the Afghan sides, and to overcome the Taliban's reluctance to join the Afghan Islamic Republic, thus ending the group's quest to reestablish its emirate.

Pakistani strategists will likely use a fatwa or religious ruling to convince the rank-and-file Taliban to embrace the Islamic Republic and an armistice once a deal is in sight. This will enable the Pakistani generals to have a permanent role and continuing influence in Afghanistan through the Taliban – a 'soft' version of the strategic depth they have sought since the 1980s.

Islamabad is currently dealing with an economic meltdown and internal political fragmentation, but Pakistan's army regards the situation as a unique opportunity to project

its power in the region with potential future dividends in Central Asia. It not only gives an edge to Pakistani generals in their internal power equations, but also makes them relevant in their relations with big powers. On the face of it, the aforementioned game plan may sound impressive but it would be foolish to underestimate Afghans. They have a unique capacity for springing surprises on foreigners whom they suspect of cheating. Remember the Jalalabad attack of 1989 after the withdrawal of Soviet forces? It humiliated the "winners" of the Cold War. The micromanaging of Afghan politics by outsiders failed in the 1990s and created huge problems for the region and the world. Imposed solutions will not work in the new Afghanistan, especially with its youth bulge and growing urbanization. Players from all sides, particularly the US and Pakistan, need to rethink their strategy. Reconciliation and peace can be achieved by a fair deal that accommodates all sides. Governments will keep changing—that is not the issue. But "rules of the game" are required. To achieve such rules, the Afghan state system, based on the Afghan Constitution, should be strengthened and should remain the focus of all efforts.

to the times of Alexander the Great will help secure the region's status as an economic and cultural crossroads of both world history and beacon for a better future. In fact, Uzbekistan will host the Central Asia at the Crossroads of World Civilizations forum next year in the ancient city of Khiva, in cooperation with UNESCO. President Mirziyoyev also used the occasion of his UN General Assembly speech to propose the formation of a new United Nations commission on Afghanistan so that through close cooperation "we can realize all the dreams and aspirations of the Afghan people." And as joint projects come to fruition the dividends of strategic collaboration will also be shared between Uzbekistan and the people of Afghanistan. As the Uzbek proverb goes, "If your country prospers, you prosper."

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Fauci says Trump campaign ad quote misleading

Top U.S. government scientist Anthony Fauci has said a clip of him used in a Trump campaign advert is misleading.

His words that he "can't imagine that anybody could be doing more" to fight Covid-19 appear in the ad to refer to President Donald Trump specifically.

But Dr Fauci, who clashed with Mr Trump before on Covid, was actually talking about himself and other staff.

The infectious diseases expert said he had never publicly endorsed any political candidate.

The dispute comes as President Trump returns to the campaign trail on Monday, just two days after his doctors gave him the all-clear to resume public events following his own treatment for coronavirus.

He faces Democrat Joe Biden in the election on

3 November.

What's the Fauci row about?

The 30-second campaign advert declares that "President Trump is recovering from the coronavirus, and so is America", before playing the clip of Dr Fauci.

The Fauci footage comes from an interview the epidemiologist did with Fox News in March.

Dr Fauci's full words in that interview are: "I have been devoting almost full time on this. I'm down at the White House virtually every day with the task force. It's every single day. So, I can't imagine that under any circumstances that anybody could be doing more."

Dr Fauci said in a statement on Sunday: "The comments attributed to me without my permission in the GOP [Republican Party] campaign ad were taken out of context from a



broad statement I made months ago about the efforts of federal public health officials."

He says: "In my nearly five decades of public service, I have never publicly endorsed any

political candidate."

The Trump campaign defended the advert. Spokesman Tim Murtaugh said: "These are Dr Fauci's own words. The video is ... **P2**

A look at the world

Nobel prize in economics awarded to Milgrom, Wilson

The 2020 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences has been jointly awarded to Paul R. Milgrom and Robert B. Wilson "for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats," the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced on Monday.

"This year's Laureates, Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson, have studied how auctions work. They have also used their insights to design new auction formats for goods and services that are difficult to sell in a traditional way, such as radio



frequencies. Their discoveries have benefitted sellers, buyers, and taxpayers around the world," the academy said in a statement.

"This year's Laureates in Economic Sciences started out with a fundamental theory and later used their results in practical applications, which have spread globally. Their discoveries are of great benefit to society," Peter Fredriksson, chair of the Prize Committee, said.

This year's laureates will not go to Stockholm to receive their awards due to coronavirus restrictions, instead, they will participate in the digital prize ceremony via video link.

"We will come back to you with details as soon as possible. But it's already clear that doctors Milgrom and Wilson will receive the rewards before the end of the year. And that they will be invited to Stockholm next time we can celebrate Nobel week with its traditional festivities," said Goran Hansson, the secretary-general of the Royal Swedish Academy.

The Nobel prize in economic sciences was the last award announced for this year with all other awards announced last week.

Majority of Arabs on social media oppose normalization



The vast majority of social media posts in the Arab world about the recent normalization agreements between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain were "negative", a report published by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs said.

The nine-page report found that 81% of Arab social media users had "negative" comments about the normalization agreements, also known as the Abraham Accords, while 8% held "very negative" opinions. Only 5% viewed them positively.

According to The Times of Israel website, the survey, which was commissioned by the ministry and conducted between mid-August and mid-September, showed that almost half of the comments - 45% - published in the Arab world considered the Israeli-Emirati agreement a "betrayal."

Twenty-seven percent expressed regret over the UAE dealings with Israel, 10% considered the agreement "hypocrisy" while 5% believed that Abu Dhabi gave in to American interests. "The minority in favor of normalization cited the deal's advantages in the areas of security (61%), economic feasibility (33%), and the "whitening" of a de facto existing situation (6%)," the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry recommended launching an online campaign "to change perceptions about Israel, with a focus on the Arab world" in order to "provide more balanced and reliable information, including within the context of legitimization regarding Israel." On Aug. 13, the UAE and Israel announced a US-brokered agreement to normalize relations, including opening embassies in each other's territory. The agreement was officially signed on Sept. 15 in Washington. The normalization deal was met with widespread condemnations from the Palestinians, who said that the agreement does not serve the Palestinian cause and ignores their rights.

The Palestinian Authority said any deal with Israel should be based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative on the principle of "land for peace" and not "peace for peace" as Israel claims.

Veteran Tajikistan president wins 5th term

Tajikistan's veteran President Emomali Rahmon has won his fifth term, receiving 90.92% of votes, the head of the central election commission said on Monday.

Bahtiyar Hudaarzade told a press conference that the voter turnout was 85.39% in Sunday's election -- 4.2 of 4.9 million registered voters exercised their democratic right.

As many as 3,375 polling stations were established in 68 constituencies.

Tajik citizens abroad also cast their votes in 39 polling booths established in different countries. Hudaarzade said Agrarian Party leader Rustam Latifzadeh received 3.03%, while Abduhalim Gafarov, the chairman of the Socialist Party of Tajikistan, got 1.49% of the votes.

Rustam Rahmatzoda, the leader of Party of



Economic Reforms, won support of 2.15% of the voters, while Communist Party Chairman Miroj Abdulloyev secured 1.17% of the votes.

The Tajikistan president is elected for a 7-year term. The last elections were held in 2013, also won by Rahmon. The 68-year-old is running the Persian-speaking nation of 9.5 million people since 1992, a period including a civil war.

However, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon had a telephone conversation with the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko at the initiative of the Belarusian side.

President Lukashenko congratulated President Rahmon on his re-election to the high post, and wished him good health and new achievements in his future responsible state activities, while to the people of Tajikistan he wished well-being and prosperity.

During the conversation, he stressed the huge contribution of President Rahmon in the establishment of peace, stability, and national accord in Tajikistan, ensuring its sustainable socio-economic development and strengthening its image in the international arena.

In a friendly atmosphere, the heads of state discussed the current state and prospects of relations and a range of other issues. They confirmed that the further development of friendly relations benefits both nations.

Some international and regional matters being of mutual interest were also discussed.



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