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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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NATO Has Reduced Number of Troops in Afghanistan to Under 12,000

"NATO backs the Afghan peace process, and we have adjusted our presence to support it; a few years ago, we had over 100,000 troops engaged in combat operations. Now we have reduced our presence to under 12,000," Stoltenberg said at a press conference after a meeting of NATO defence ministers, Sputnik reported.

Regarding the peace process, Stoltenberg stressed the need for the Taliban to sever all ties with the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation.

"The Taliban must reduce the unacceptable levels of violence, to pave the way for a ceasefire. They must break all ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups so that Afghanistan never again serves as a platform for terrorist attacks on our countries," the NATO secretary-general said.

Speaking about the news of an ... **P3**



14 Killed, 35 Injured In Suicide Bombing At Education Centre In Kabul

According to preliminary reports, at least 14 people were killed and 35 wounded in a suicide bombing at an education centre in Kabul city's PD13 on Saturday.

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said the blast was caused by a suicide bomber who tried to target the Kawsar-e Danesh tuition centre in the Pul-e-Khoshk area of Dasht-e-Barchi in western Kabul.

Spokesperson for the MoI, Tariq Arian, said the bomber was identified by the security guard of the institution and detonated his explosives before reaching the target.

Abdullah Abdullah, chairperson for the High Council for National Reconciliation, called the attack inhumane and against Islamic norms. The explosion took place at 4:30 pm. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Saleh: Name and Shame Campaign Against Criminals Will Not Stop in Kabul



First Vice President Amrullah Saleh on Saturday released a new list of decisions regarding the security of Kabul city and said that the capital had not seen any major crimes in the past week.

He noted that there had been cases of family violence and three sniper attacks by the Taliban in the outer districts.

However, Saleh added that the name and shame campaign of posting criminals' photos in public places had been successful and several had surrendered to the police.

"Gang members have asked for pardon in return for cooperation in dismantling the entire criminal network. Name and shame

campaign will not stop. We will catch them all," Saleh said.

He said that a number of criminals had agreed to surrender due to family pressure and this tactical approach was working for them. Several whose photos had not even been posted, came forward to report in exchange of their reputation being preserved.

"In this regard, work is being done on a case-by-case basis," he said. "None of the long list of 2,500 people has been incorrect so far, including government officials."

The vice president said that wealthy and powerful residents of several neighbourhoods had also voluntarily vacated the encroached green areas. The residents had asked the police to give them a day and not to publicly shame them.

He said that there were no undocumented vehicles in Kabul without license plates and have seized hundreds of violators.

In another part of his article, he stressed that those who defame government forces are being prosecuted.

However, With the reduction in foreign troop levels, President Ashraf Ghani said on Saturday, that the security sector will reform and implement plans to move towards self-sufficiency.

Ghani addressed the closing ceremony of the 2020 Future Force Conference on the theme "Strengthening and Reforms of Afghanistan National Defence and Security forces" at the ... **P3**

China calls for orderly U.S. pullout from Afghanistan

The United States of America should withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in an orderly and responsible manner, says China.

An orderly U.S. military pullout was important to prevent further escalation of violence in Afghanistan, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said.

At a regular media briefing in Beijing on Thursday, Zhao Lijian said intra-Afghan negotiations had opened a window of opportunity for realising peace in Afghanistan.

Both sides -- the Afghan government and the Taliban -- would put the national interest first and seize the opportunity to find common ground, the official hoped. ... **P2**



U.S. poll outcome won't affect peace talks: Karzai

The upcoming U.S. election's result will have no significant impact on the Afghan peace process, believes former president Hamid Karzai.

In an interview released on Friday, Karzai said: "I don't think the outcome will have an impact that will deviate from the current process."

America's overall objective of achieving a negotiated settlement to the war in Afghanistan and reducing troops would remain unaffected, he thought.

Speaking to VOA, Karzai said President Donald Trump's views on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, or a significant cut in troops, had been clear.

He said the Afghans respected Trump's stance on reaching a settlement and on allowing the Afghans to determine their own future.

The U.S.-Taliban peace deal, as far



as it envisaged an end to the war in Afghanistan, was wonderful, the ex-president remarked.

"Whether the U.S. intention in Afghanistan is durable peace and a settlement is what we should see in the process," he explained.

On the Afghan peace process, the U.S. was in great coordination with Pakistan, he noted, acknowledging

the importance of Islamabad's role. "But peace for us is one thing and a deal between the U.S. and Pakistan on us is a different issue. That we don't want. That we will resist," he said.

Exactly similar deals were in evidence between the U.S. and Pakistan when the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, he recalled. ... **P3**

UK and Japan...

the Comprehensive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The 11-nation free-trade area covered 13 percent of the global economy in 2019 and more than \$144 billion of trade, according to the British government.

President Trump pulled the U.S. out of the trading bloc in 2017 but other members include Australia, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore and Vietnam.

Membership could offer Britain strategic leverage in a part of the world that's growing increasingly important economically. For a post-Brexit UK looking to restart growth hit hard by the pandemic, the region will be especially enticing.

It's likely some member-nations will want to see the benefits of a deal with Japan before they allow Britain to join. But 10 months after the UK left the EU, it has its first major deal as an independent trading nation.

China calls...

China had always supported an "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" inclusive peace and reconciliation process, the spokesman added.

The international community, including the U.S., should play a constructive role in advancing intra-Afghan talks, he said.

"At the same time, we believe that no one should arbitrarily interfere in the peace and reconciliation process," Zhao stressed.

Promote security and stability was a prerequisite for peace, reconciliation, reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, the official maintained.

By EurAsian Times Desk

Will The U.S. Really Vacate Its Billion-Dollar Defence Base in Afghanistan – The Bagram Airbase?

Nowhere in the world can there ever be a sight where US soldiers are seen packing their bags to fly back home after entering into a peace deal with the same people they had trained their guns on – Afghan Taliban, along with 40 other nations for 19 years!

The shabbily dressed Afghan-Taliban fighters made the global super-power 'scurry for cover' and President Donald Trump has finally announced to bring back US troops by Christmas from the war-torn country, something which the Pentagon does not want.

The experts are left in a quandary over the fact that when Pentagon and the US establishment does not want it, why is Trump so hell-bent on withdrawing from Afghanistan?

The answer lies in a study, which, however, almost unnoticed from the public gaze, claims that around 5,00,000 US military men, who have at some time served in Iraq or Afghanistan, have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder!

An entire generation in the US has been ruined by such fruitless wars and the nation's masses want an answer to it. The story, which was highlighted on ncbi.nlm.nih.gov on October 4, 2016, had prompted Trump to make a political issue out of it.

He finally, on September 8, 2020, crossed the proverbial rubicon by saying that the Pentagon wants to keep the war contractors happy.

Why would the Pentagon, even at the cost of Donald Trump's reputation, like to vacate the Bagram Airbase, in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, which is by no means a mini-city by all standards?

A YouTube documentary by SBS Dateline, published on May 12, 2019, details the luxurious inside life of Bagram Air Base, in Jalalabad, about 70 kms north of Kabul, occupying about 5000 acres of land, and which had about 20,000 US troops stationed inside for two decades.

The airbase had almost everything to replicate the comforts of a home. It had a Freedom Radio station, Burger King, Dodge Challenger and Harley Davidson showrooms, a shopping mall housing every product the US soldiers could have bought back home. The place had beauty and spa outlets and even a hospital and credit card swapping centres.



To summarise, it had everything which gave the solace of home. There were around 4000 civilians from Russia, India and Pakistan who worked there as coffee boys and cleaners, etc. This airbase has now to be vacated.

Interestingly, this was the same base which the Russians had used against the Afghan-Taliban and now after US evacuation guess who is likely to settle in it? China! But as a friend of Afghan-Taliban.

This airbase was no ordinary location as Trump had himself visited it and spent time with US soldiers, with even former US President Obama, George W Bush Junior and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai reported to have been regularly visiting the base.

But now the US has a future plan, as it has envisaged BECA with India, which will help it to formulate its strategy to contain China, Pakistan as well as Afghanistan, so why would the country then leave Afghanistan?

Perhaps never, as it will be foolish for the US in the first place to forsake its stranglehold in Afghanistan. The country will likely rent the war to its private army, Blackwater, which will keep the fight alive with Afghan-Taliban, along with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and remnants of Ashraf Ghani government along with India, which under BECA will surely like US 'giving a reply' to China and Pakistan in case they go for a war against India, as that would mean a war with the US, under BECA.

This airbase has been very critical for the US operations in the region, as it was from here the US fighters had flown to gun-down Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, a claim which has been termed as a 'hoax' by Trump recently.

He claimed that the one who was killed was Osama's body-double, creating yet another storm in US polity. This statement from Trump is proof enough of the swordfight between him and the Pentagon. Strangely, the President is even ready to malign the US's most coveted trophy, apparently to drub his opponent, Joseph Biden.

Meanwhile, either Trump or Pentagon or both have given yet another proof on how a promise on a deal is reneged, since, on October 18, Afghan-Taliban claimed that the latest excessive US airstrikes on non-combat zones in Afghanistan was a violation of the Doha agreement (signed between Afghan-Taliban and US on Feb 29, 2020).

The Afghan-Taliban was referring to a powerful blast that occurred outside police headquarters, killing 15 in Feroz Koh in Ghaur province, while the US has called it to be 'consistent' with the Doha agreement.

One high ranking official, Abdullah Abdullah, in Ashraf Ghani government, had visited Pakistan and India lately, and later Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was on a three-day visit to Pakistan, to speculate about the growing probability; if the US is going to vacate Afghanistan fully.

By HIKMAT NOORI

The Taliban's Highway Robbery

Each year, as winter closes in on Afghanistan's rugged mountainous region, Mohammad Bilal, a 45-year-old coal worker, readies himself for a busy few months. As temperatures drop, and without better sources for heat, the demand for coal will soar.

This year, Bilal, who requested to go by a pseudonym for his safety, expects the winter months to be stressful for a different reason. Thanks to hikes in the payments that the Taliban extort from businesses as "taxes," he expects the price of this essential winter commodity to rise significantly—straining markets and customers who depend on the fuel for warmth. While businesses in the region have grown accustomed to local insurgent groups demanding money, the recent spike in fighting has seen an increase in the amount they have had to pay to ensure secure passage of their goods through Taliban-controlled areas. "We pay the Afghan

government taxes, but we also have to pay the Taliban to continue operating," Bilal, who has been operating a coal distribution business in the northern provinces of Afghanistan for the last 18 years, said in September. "Earlier we used to pay Taliban 3,000-3,500 afghanis [\$40-45] per truck, but now they charge 10,000 afghanis [\$130] per truck. This is aside from what we pay the Afghan government."

The Taliban's so-called taxes are collected at various checkpoints along the national highways that crisscross Afghanistan's conflict-riddled landscape. In years past, the checkpoints weren't always manned. But this year, "there is always someone there to collect the money," Bilal said. The Taliban even issue tax receipts complete with their logo and a stamp to officiate the collection process. A failure to pay or to provide a receipt, Bilal says, is punished by Taliban insurgents setting fire to their trucks.

Rizwan, an Afghan truck driver who regularly transits the northern trade routes between Kabul and the provinces that border Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, concurred with Bilal. Rizwan, whose name has also been changed, has been a driver for nearly a decade and has seen the gradual change in the Taliban's extortion operations. "Not only do they have more control over certain parts of the road than they did before, they are also more serious about collecting their taxes," he said in an interview in September. "If we don't pay, they won't let us pass. ... If you escape, you will be caught at another checkpoint. It is impossible to avoid their taxes."

According to Mohammad Najeeb Azizi, a former chief economist with the Afghan government, the Taliban are also getting serious about levying their tolls in the south, southeast, southwest, and including on crucial trade highways between Herat and Kandahar, Kabul ...

P3

UN chief...

The two Libyan delegations to the 5+5 Joint Military Commission talks signed a complete, countrywide, and permanent cease-fire agreement with immediate effect, she said. "The agreement was facilitated by the United Nations and we signed it as witnesses."

Williams said the Libyan parties agreed that all military units and armed groups on the front lines shall return to their camps. This shall be accompanied by the departure of all mercenaries and foreign fighters from Libya within a maximum period of three months.

The cease-fire does not apply to UN-designated terrorist groups, she said.

The parties agreed, with the support and participation of the United Nations, to immediately start the identification and categorization of all armed groups and entities on the entire Libyan territory, whether integrated into state institutions or not, she said.

Guterres said the Joint Military Commission wanted the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution to ensure compliance and implementation of the cease-fire agreement by all internal and external parties. He said the appeal by the parties will be conveyed to the Security Council and will be heard.

"So, there is a very clear commitment of the parties to themselves (to) implement the agreement and, at the same time, to ask for the support of the UN in that implementation. But it is a Libyan-led process of implementation and of monitoring."

On the other hand, there is another process in parallel that is taking place for the convening of the Political Dialogue Forum, he said, expressing the hope that this will be a very important step, making the Libyans come together in finding a way to move forward with the political process, taking into account the necessary establishment of future institutions in Libya that

will guarantee peace and stability.

The United Nations also is working with the African Union, which is preparing a large meeting for reconciliation of different entities in Libya, he said.

"From now on, what is important is implementation, implementation, implementation."

He expressed the hope that the Libya cease-fire may serve as inspiration for the peaceful settlement of other conflicts in the world.

"In the context of my repeated calls for a global cease-fire so that we can focus all our energies on the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the inspiration of the Libyan agreement, now is the time to mobilize all efforts to support the mediations taking place to end the conflicts in Yemen, Afghanistan and in Armenia and Azerbaijan, where active hostilities are causing immense suffering for civilians," he said. "There is no military solution for any of these conflicts. The solution must be political."

More than 8.7bn afs revenue collected in 15 days: MoF

Over 8.7 billion afs revenue collected in the past two weeks, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) said in a statement on Saturday. From October 5 till 20, the MoF says that more than 8.7 billion afs revenue has been collected. 808 million afs generated from revenue departments, 2.5 billion afs from income tax, 1.5 billion afs

from other sources and 3.8 billion afs from custom departments. Since the beginning of current fiscal year total 135.5 billion afs revenue had been collected. The MoF statement said more than 89.1 billion afs budget had been spent that included 54 percent development budget and 68 common budget.



Exchange Rates

76.7	\$	76.8
90.1	€	90.2
98.9	£	99
474	Rp.	475
20.75	دولار	20.85
1030	₹	1040

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Kabul Ambulance - 112

Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital

0202301360

Ata Turk Hospital

0202500312

Corona call center - 166

NATO Has Reduced...

intra-Libyan ceasefire agreement, the military bloc's chief Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO welcomed the agreement. "We welcome the announced ceasefire. We strongly support the UN efforts to try to find a political, peaceful solution to the conflict in Libya, and of course, the first important step of any lasting peaceful solution is a ceasefire," Stoltenberg explained.

However, the alliance chief stressed that the mission in Iraq will be expanded.

"Today, ministers tasked our military commanders to expand our mission in Iraq," he said.

According to the NATO chief, the alliance will continue to consult with the international anti-terrorist coalition and Iraqi authorities.

At the same time, the decisions by Turkey and Greece to cancel military exercises, which were previously set to be held next week, were welcomed by NATO's leadership.

"We also welcome the flexibility we've seen both from Turkey and from Greece and the announcement Greece and Turkey made at a meeting today that they have cancelled their respective military exercises next week. These are steps in the right direction, and it helps to reduce the risks of incidents and accidents, and I hope also it can be something we can build on, and I hope also it will support the efforts of Germany to facilitate exploratory talks about the underlying dispute between the two countries," Stoltenberg said.

NATO member states held a two-day online meeting on October 22-23 to discuss efforts to strengthen deterrence against security challenges, as well as the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Saleh: Name and...

Presidential Palace.

The conference's aim was to identify problems, trim unnecessary expenses, establish reforms and ensure proper allocation for resources to better support forces on the front lines.

National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib said such conferences were important for a comprehensive analysis of the current security situation and to maintain transparency so that the government of Afghanistan could provide for its own security and defence forces.

Referring to the increased coordination between the leadership and lower-ranking security officials, Mohib said they would take urgent action to resolve any issues. Ghani thanked the security forces and said that the conference has brought more order to their plans for self-sufficiency, autonomy and reform of the military.

The Taliban's...

and Kandahar, and even Kabul and Khost. "In fact, it is not only the coal traders who are paying these illegal taxes to the Taliban, but there are unconfirmed reports that even state-owned enterprises such as DABS [Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Afghanistan's national power company] are paying these taxes to them in a number of districts they control," he said in Kabul in October.

"The Taliban have various sources of revenue, mainly coming from state as well as nonstate actors in the region and internationally," Azizi pointed out. "However, for their local military operations, they rely heavily on the narcotics and mining sector, along with collecting Islamic taxes such as zakat and ushr from local farmers and businesses."

The Taliban's finances, although opaque, have been the subject of many studies over the years. A recent report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty estimated that the Taliban earned a total of \$1.6 billion in the last financial year, of which \$160 million was acquired from taxes. This is significantly higher than in the previous years, when the total was speculated to be about \$1 billion. The most notable increase in profits, the report observed, was from the mining sector, "growing from \$35

million in 2016 to \$464 million in 2020."

Afghan officials acknowledge the problem. "Let's not call it tax. Tax is only paid to the government that provides services to the people," Shamroz Khan Masjidi, a spokesperson at the Afghan Finance Ministry, said in an interview in Kabul last week. "What the Taliban collect is extortion money and is against the law," he said, admitting that it was an unfortunate extra burden on the private sector. The Afghan security agencies have attempted, with little success, to protect districts and highways that the Taliban troll for "tax collection." However, the magnitude of the war and the increasing areas of control under the Taliban have made it harder to prevent the group's illegal business.

Afghan economists suspect the increase in the amount that the Taliban extort from the transportation services is to help fund their growing insurgency. According to Azizi, the revenue is used particularly for financing their operations, strengthening their networks, and for new recruitments. "Of course, since the deal signed between the U.S. and Taliban, we have seen a dramatic increase in the military operations by the Taliban across the country, so I do see it as a reason why this may have increased taxes and collection

frequencies," he speculated.

Meanwhile, the Taliban taxes have become part of the way the group is positioning itself as an alternative government. The Taliban spend a small fraction of their budgets on public services. For instance, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, they launched a health campaign to raise awareness of the disease and encourage people to take precaution. However, such efforts are not a significant portion of the Taliban's spending.

For local coal businesses, the multiple duties, coupled with high costs of production and labor, are bound to increase the costs of their products this year. "Last year, the prices were about 12,000 afghanis [\$156] per tonne, but this year it is already over 15,000 afghanis [\$195] for the same amount, and we fear it might increase further," Bilal said. "I don't know how will the poor will afford coal, especially with the winter coming."

Rizwan added in agreement. "The rich will survive. It will be the poor Afghans who will suffer," he said, the concern sounding deeply personal to the truck driver who makes about \$130 per month. "We earn our living, despite these risks, to feed our family and children, but they use the money they collect to feed our children and families with bullets and rockets."

Pakistan to...

taken off the gray list of the FATF as Islamabad made significant progress in implementing FATF criteria.

"The process of FATF is ongoing. Pakistan is implementing the FATF Action Plan since 2018 and we have made significant progress in this regard. Our entire AML/CFT [Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism] regime has been revamped in compliance with the Action Plan to bring it to the international standards set by FATF," Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri told

reporters.

Islamabad's efforts include legislative, regulatory and operational measures, he said, adding that the FATF had also acknowledged Pakistan's political commitment and progress multiple areas of the Action Plan.

Islamabad has been on the FATF's Compliance Document, also known as its Gray List, since June 2018 for alleged terrorist financing and money laundering risks after an assessment of the country's financial system and security mechanisms.

In February, the 36-nation watchdog agreed to give

Pakistan until June, when it would review the country's status on the list, to comply with all 27 points listed in the action plan.

However, the meeting was postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In September, the country's parliament amended 14 laws related to its legal system to fulfill the FATF standards, while having already satisfied 13 other points.

Since 2018, Pakistan has since twice escaped being placed on the watchdog's financial crime blacklist with the support of Turkey, China and Malaysia.

U.S. poll outcome...

The ensuing misery for Afghans still continued, he complained.

He hoped all neighbours would participate in the Afghan peace process by working in tandem with the U.S. and major powers like Russia, China and India.

"There should be no behind-the-scenes deals or schemes there. We want transparency. We don't want Afghanistan to be a place of conflict of interest between countries."

Asked about the deadlocked talks in Doha, he replied they had no issue with the Taliban, almost the same delegation

and the same leadership, during talks in Moscow.

"If the intention in the U.S. is for peace in Afghanistan, these talks will succeed. I have no doubt. And if the intention in Pakistan, together with the U.S., is for peace in Afghanistan, these talks will succeed. And we welcome it."

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UN chief welcomes Libya cease-fire accord

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday welcomed the signing of a cease-fire agreement by the Libyan parties in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations.

"This is a fundamental step toward peace and stability in Libya. I congratulate the parties for putting the interest of their nation ahead of their differences," Guterres told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York.

He appealed to all stakeholders and regional actors to respect the provisions of the cease-fire agreement and ensure its implementation without delay.

He called on the international community to support Libyans in implementing the cease-fire and in bringing an end to the conflict. This includes ensuring the full and unconditional respect for the Security Council arms embargo on Libya, he said.

Guterres urged the Libyan parties to maintain the current momentum and show the same determination in reaching a political solution to the conflict, resolving economic issues and addressing the humanitarian situation.

The UN Support Mission in Libya is making preparations to resume the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, which will be preceded by a series of meetings and consultations that would facilitate the resumption of inclusive intra-Libyan political talks, he said.

There is no military solution to the conflict in Libya. This cease-fire agreement is a critical step. But there is much hard work ahead. The United Nations will continue to support the Libyan parties in the search for lasting peace in their country, he said. Guterres' acting special representative for Libya, Stephanie Williams, announced the news of the cease-fire ... **P2**



A look at the world

OIC slams French incitement against Islam, prophet

The General Secretariat of the (OIC) on Friday condemned continued attacks and incitement against Muslim sentiment and insults of Prophet Muhammad.

A statement by the group criticized the "discourse from certain French politicians, which it deems to be harmful to the Muslim-French relations, hate-mongering and only serving partisan political interests."

It said it "will always condemn practices of blasphemy and of insulting Prophets



of Islam, Christianity and Judaism" as it condemned any crime committed in the name of religion;

It also denounced the killing of French teacher Samuel Paty, who was decapitated last Friday in a Paris suburb.

The statement rejected the incitement against Islam, its symbols and linking Islam and Muslims with terrorism.

In recent weeks, French President Emmanuel Macron attacked Islam and the Muslim community, accusing Muslims of "separatism" and he said previously that "Islam is a religion in crisis all over the world."

The coincided with a provocative move by Charlie Hebdo, a left-wing French magazine infamous for publishing anti-Islamic content, which has drawn widespread anger and outrage across the Muslim world.

The caricatures were first published in 2006 by a Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten, sparking a wave of protests.

UK and Japan sign \$20 billion free trade agreement



The UK and Japan have signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in Tokyo, marking Britain's first major international business deal since Brexit. The British government said it expects a \$19.9 billion economic boost from the agreement over the next 15 years.

The UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement was approved in principle on September 11 but was signed on Friday in the Japanese capital. It is set to come into effect on January 1 next year. The UK's International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, described the move as a "landmark moment for Britain", adding "... it shows what we (UK) can do as an independent trading nation".

The British government claims the deal goes beyond the existing one Japan already has with the EU, and follows months of negotiations between the two sides. Tech will be a particular focus of the partnership including digital trade and data.

Other beneficiaries will include financial services and the food and drink sector. Lower tariffs are expected on products like British pork and salmon and Japanese cars and electronics. In total, the UK government expects British businesses to enjoy tariff-free trade on 99 percent of exports to the Asian country.

Post-Brexit trade deals

The agreement will be seen as a major victory for UK at a time when it's embroiled in tough and often fraught trade negotiations with the EU. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is also targeting agreements with the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, those plans have barely got off the ground. An economically and symbolically significant deal with the U.S. looks like it has been pushed into next year.

For the government in Westminster, the focus now has to be on securing some form of agreement with the EU, its closest trading partner and where 43 percent of its exports currently go. But, this deal with Japan does have other benefits for Britain's role in Asia. Japanese Foreign Minister, Motegi Toshimitsu, who signed the FTA said he supports the UK's inclusion in ... **P2**

Pakistan to stay on watchdog's gray list until February

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global money-laundering watchdog, on Friday announced to keep Pakistan on its watch list known as "gray list" until February next year.

Announcing the FATF's three-day Plenary decisions, the president of the 36-nations organization, Marcus Pleyer, said that members agreed to maintain Pakistan's status on FATF's gray list.

Addressing a virtual news conference, Pleyer said Pakistan has made progress and completed 21 items out of 27 of its action plan.

"The government of Pakistan has signaled its commitment to complete the rest of its action plan but it is clear even though



Pakistan has made progress, it needs to do more".

The next review will take place in February 2021, he added.

During the presser, when several Indian journalists asking questions regarding Pakistan moving to "black list" in next meeting, the FATF's president said "we must treat Pakistan equally to other countries and as long as we see that the country is progressing with the action items and we have seen progress with Pakistan".

Reacting to FATF decision, Pakistan Minister for Industries & Production Hammad Azhar said that his country has achieved impressive progress on its FATF action plan.

"21 out of 27 action items now stand cleared. Remaining 6 rated as partially complete. Within a year, we progressed from 5/27 to 21/27 completed items. FATF acknowledged that any blacklisting is off the table now," Azhar tweeted.

"Instead of current Action Plan, discussions remained focused on how Pak can be facilitated for our upcoming 2nd evaluation (MER), due mid next year. I congratulate our Federal and Provincial Teams who have worked day and night even during the pandemic to ensure this turn around," Azhar said. Last week Pakistan foreign ministry said that the country's hopes to be ... **P3**



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