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Ghani Meets Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto

Pekka Haavisto, Finland's Foreign Minister is on a visit to Afghanistan to discuss the peace process and the upcoming international pledging conference in Geneva.

“A stable Afghanistan is in the interest of Finland and the whole Europe,” the government of Finland said.

Haavisto met President Ashraf Ghani, acting Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar and National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib.

They discussed the Afghanistan 2020 Conference which is being co-chaired by Finland and developments in the Afghan peace process.

Ghani said the conference showed the international community's interests in preserving the achievements of the past 19 years, including women and children's rights, and the democratic system in Afghanistan. ... **P2**



Foreign Minister Jaishankar: India Has Stakes in Afghanistan's Stability

Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar told visiting U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo that India has stakes in Afghanistan's stability, and that decision about the country's future should be made by Afghans without use of force.

The two met at India's capital city of Delhi on Monday — a day before the third India-US 2+2 ministerial meeting was set to start.

After his meeting with Pompeo, Jaishankar tweeted, “Discussed key bilateral, regional and global issues. Reviewed progress in ties: grown substantially in every domain. Our foreign policy consultations and cooperation have expanded.”

Indian media said that Pompeo shared the U.S. administration's thinking on Afghanistan with Jaishankar.

Jaishankar also made it clear that cross-border terrorism was “completely unacceptable” to India.

Nearly 6,000 Afghan civilians killed, wounded in 2020: UNAMA



In a new report released Tuesday, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said the overall civilian casualty figure for the first nine months of this year had dropped by about 30 percent against the same period last year but that the harm done to civilians remains inordinate and shocking.

In their latest quarterly report, UNAMA documented 5,939 civilian casualties (2,117 killed and 3,822 injured) from 1 January to 30 September 2020.

In their report, the mission said: “High levels of violence continue with a devastating impact on civilians, with Afghanistan remaining among the deadliest places in the world to be a

civilian.” UNAMA stated that while the number of civilian casualties documented is the lowest in the first nine months of any year since 2012, “the harm done to civilians remains inordinate and shocking.”

Once again the mission called on all parties to the conflict to end the violence. They said the parties “can and must do more to protect civilians from harm by urgently reviewing practices and strengthening mitigation measures, as well as working towards an end to the fighting – the only way to definitively stop conflict-related civilian casualties.”

UNAMA noted however that there had been no reduction in the documented number of civilian casualties, caused by parties involved in the current peace talks, since intra-Afghan negotiations started in September in comparison to previous weeks.

The mission said the period from 1 October is outside the scope of UNAMA's latest quarterly report, but “raises its increasing concern over the intensification of the fighting in Helmand, as well as several indiscriminate attacks in Nangarhar, Laghman and Ghor along with an airstrike in Takhar and a suicide attack targeting civilians in Kabul that taken together killed and injured

more than 400 civilians.”

“The peace talks will need some time to help deliver peace. But all parties can immediately prioritize discussions and take urgent, and frankly overdue, additional steps to stem the terrible harm to civilians,” said Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan.

“New thinking and concrete action towards safeguarding civilian life will not only save thousands of families from suffering and grief but it can also help lessen recriminations and, instead, bolster confidence and trust among negotiators,” said Lyons, who is also head of UNAMA.

The mission stated that more than four out of every ten civilian casualties are children or women. Child casualties amounted to 31 percent of all civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2020, and women casualties 13 percent. UNAMA found that Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) remain responsible for the majority of civilian casualties (58 percent).

The mission also stated that attacks causing civilian casualties carried out by undetermined AGE increased. “There were more incidents, especially in relation to the use of IEDs and targeted killings, in which UNAMA could not determine ... **P3**

All 7 Attackers Killed as Khost Attack Ends After 9 Hours

The Ministry of Interior said the attack on the police special unit in the provincial capital of Khost has ended with the death of seven assailants after almost nine hours on Tuesday.

The clashes began at 5:50 a.m. after a car bomb exploded and the attackers entered the compound and faced off against the Afghan security forces.

Gov. Sediq Patman said in an interview that the attackers had prepared three car bombs but two explosions were prevented by the security forces.

The initial casualties are said to be at least three people killed and 25 injured, including civilians and security personnel.



Saleh: Haqqani, IS-K Have Launched Public War in Western Kabul

First Vice President Amrullah Saleh said the Haqqani network and the Islamic State (Daesh) group had launched a “public war” against residents of western Kabul and security coverage would be different due to the severity of the threat.

Saleh wrote on his Facebook page on Tuesday that work has begun to get the comments of people on security measures in the area.

“When our oppressed patriots are attacked and assassinated just for studying and trying to acquire knowledge, to reduce that pain, we all become Shiites and do not recognize the religious frontier,” Saleh said.

He said they will continue to investigate the Kowsar-e Danesh attack till the perpetrators are



brought to justice.

Saleh also said that those suspected of ties with terrorists will be prosecuted and held accountable.

He said that it was necessary for people to know the “bloodthirsty figures” and those who are the enemies of the “nation and state.” He added that the cabinet has strongly rejected those opposing the “name and shame” campaign

of printing posters of criminals. The plan to launch zamraks in schools has also been approved by the cabinet.

He also said that there will be a clear separation between the police and the national security spheres. The organisation of national security forces will be secret, and the public presence of national security in Kabul will be removed.

Thousands in...

French products “peaceful”.

In a separate rally on Sunday, students of Bangladesh’s leading Dhaka University gathered in the capital to protest the “state-sponsored display of the caricature of Prophet Muhammad in France”.

They called on Bangladesh’s Foreign Ministry to recall the French ambassador.

Saleh Uddin Sifat, a law student at the university, said: “We believe in freedom of expression and press, but insulting one’s belief and religion should not be accepted. We encountered this in Nazi Germany’s anti-Semitic propaganda cartoons.”

The boycott drive has impacted the trade of French products in Bangladesh, traders say.

“We generally see people enquiring about the origin of products for assessing its quality. But for the last couple of days, we have noticed some people enquiring about whether the products were from France,” Md. Sirajul Islam, a cosmetic product trader in Dhaka’s New Market Shopping Mall, told Anadolu Agency.

He added: “I sell many French perfumes, but now their demand has hit rock bottom.”

Ghani Meets...

Mohib discussed peace and security in the nation and said Afghanistan “seeks to protect” civilian lives, human rights and democracy.

The Afghanistan 2020 Conference is scheduled for Nov. 23-24 and the aim is to support the nation’s road towards sustainable development, peace, prosperity and self-reliance.

By Sadaf Tahib

Afghan Women Peace and Security

Women play a crucial Role both at home and In the society. Women, based on a famous proverb, raise generations by raising and educating a child. Whether consciously or unconsciously women always had a stake in the peace process across tribal issues from the very beginning of civilization. From an Islamic point of view, I can elaborate It by referencing Prophet Mohammad’s wives who contributed each on social, political, economic, and peace and stability to their proportion. Later, new cultures and traditions came into being which partially or inappropriately transformed between generations. This resulted; discriminations, lack of accountability among different clusters, inequality, and civil wars. In between all these anarchy and chaos, women were most affected thoroughly.

Woman’s participation in the peace process consequences its feasible implementation. According to UN Women, between 1992 and 2011, just 2 percent of chief mediators and 9 percent of negotiators in peace processes were women. Based on research lack of women participation in peace talks is linked to broader dilemmas in the peacemaking process. According to Marie O’Reilly, editor and research fellow at the International Peace Institute (IPI), “Research shows that both mediators and belligerents perceive a tradeoff between the short-term goal of ending the violence and the long-term goal of building peace. The short term goal of ending violence is emphasized at the expense of the longer vision of how to build peace, and this rationale feeds into the exclusion of women.”

“Women’s priorities for peace differ from men. We see this when they do participate in peace processes, especially when they’re not a member of one of the belligerent parties, women very often bring up a more diverse range of issues,” Ms. O’Reilly said. Additionally, Thania Paffenholz stresses that; “Being at the table or being at a mediation set-up is not enough,” citing the examples of the constituent assembly in Nepal and Yemen, where there was 35% women participation across delegations, but this did not bring women’s issues, larger peace or civil rights matters into fore for discussion. This scenario applies to Afghanistan, since 2019 women hold 27% of the parliament seats while, but lack of educational opportunities was

rated as the biggest problem women Confronted with (43.2%), followed by lack of rights (34.1%), lack of employment (24.1%), violence (18.1%), lack of services (13.7%), and economic concerns (9.6%).

Contributing to women empowerment at a global level, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace, and security in October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to the conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides several important operational mandates, with implications for the Member States and the entities of the United Nations system.

Throughout history women’s stance has been controversial; activists, governments, and international agencies have been contributing to women empowerment to their puissance. Nevertheless, there are challenges to consider throughout the process. Education and economic independence can have a considerable stake on the table for women to mediate and negotiate. Several projects have laid to educate rural and urban women, but it remains unclear how effective they have been due to challenges in their design, implementation, and evaluation. Gender training has difficulty in standards in between theory and practice. They are not inclusive and the delivery methods and implementation are considered sensitive due to barriers and lack of access to resources specifically in rural areas. As per evaluation, due to the lack of data and information, it is difficult to observe the change in quality and quantity both in the short-term and long run.

Women’s participation in peace process also means their contribution military and police components that face numerous barriers. These range from practical challenges to taboos and stigmas. Mission leaders often look primarily at a woman’s gender at the expense of her identity as a professional. This can lead them to conflate women peacekeepers with local non-mission civilian women who need protection and thus keep them on-base instead of allowing them to patrol. Another systemic challenge is sexual harassment and assault of both men and women deployed to peace operations. These challenges are particularly pervasive in the practice and rhetoric around women, peace, and security and the protection of civilians. Conversations around protection tend to use the term “women and children,” which lumps together two different demographic groups, reinforces the idea that women need protection, treats women as a unitary group, and excludes the protection needs of men. These conversations also tend to disproportionately focus on conflict-related sexual violence and can be based on unproven assumptions. To achieve their goals on women’s participation in peacekeeping, the UN and member states need to consider transformative possibilities that push back against these assumptions and norms. This requires grounding integration strategies in evidence, transforming missions to improve the experiences of women peacekeepers, and implementing a gendered approach to community engagement and protection. In conclusion, to achieve sustainable peace, the mediators, advocates and activists, policymakers, and international agencies must support women’s meaningful engagement in the process; including Women rights and freedoms should form the agenda, Vigorous presence of women at the table, establish a fair and transparent selection process during the talks, create conditions for everyone to be heard equally, and keep public power and politics in mind. Any peace agreement between the Taliban and Afghan government must secure the fundamental rights of women.

Women and Peace process in Afghanistan

Thee country is governed by the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan sanctioned ... **P3**

By LOWY Institute

Can China Bring Peace to Afghanistan?

The recent measures China has taken against the Uighur population – including 2 million detained in “re-education camps”, sterilisation of women and pervasive surveillance of the –population are indicative of lengths to which its fear of insurgency and terrorism from within govern its perception of threats against the state and its foreign policy.

“China would be welcomed as an arbitrator in negotiations [for peace in Afghanistan] and should not leave matters of such a great importance solely to the US,” said Maulana Samiul Haq, the so-called “Father of the Taliban”, in 2018.

Peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban finally began in September in Qatar – long after the stop-start US negotiations with the Taliban that have preceded the anticipated departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and the US have strongly encouraged the peace

process. But the idea of bringing China to the table has never manifested.

China does have a strong interest in resolving conflict in Afghanistan. Yet Beijing has kept a conspicuously low profile, to the point of invisibility, even though its close ties with the involved parties – the Afghan government, the Taliban and Pakistan – put it in perhaps the best position to mediate talks.

The time has come for China to step forward and use its influential economic clout and political power to help bring an end to Afghanistan’s 40 years of conflict.

While China has shown little interest in the root causes of the conflict in Afghanistan, it does have two strategic goals in the country. China is nonetheless well-equipped to assume the role of peacemaker in Afghanistan.

At a local level, the Taliban have previously supported and welcomed Uighur Muslims fighting in Afghanistan’s insurgency,

so China fears the potential of threats and influence crossing the border and returning home to Xinjiang province. In line with its overarching concern for the “three evils” informing its foreign policy – extremism, separatism and terrorism – China’s interests and involvement in Afghanistan have increased as US involvement in the region has decreased.

Following Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s first visit to China in 2014, he reportedly approved the extradition of 15 Uighur militants who had taken refuge in Afghan territory. In 2015, Taliban representatives met secretly in China with Stanekzai, of the Afghan Peace Council, in a bid to de-escalate the conflict. China appears willing to work with both Taliban and more moderate Afghan leadership to interrupt the nexus between external Islamic extremists and Xinjiang Uighur separatists.

The recent measures China has taken against the Uighur population – including 2 million

detained in “re-education camps”, sterilisation of women and pervasive surveillance of the –population are indicative of lengths to which its fear of insurgency and terrorism from within govern its perception of threats against the state and its foreign policy. Stability and reconciliation in Afghanistan would potentially reduce one source of internal anxiety which currently besets Beijing.

But Beijing also has a far larger goal in promoting economic investment as part of its larger plan for regional development through its Belt and Road Initiative. A resolution or even a reduction of conflict in Afghanistan would ensure a more stable economic environment for the further economic growth of China.

Although the border China shares with Afghanistan is only 76 kilometres long, this small portal opens to a vast expanse of markets and supplies necessary for China’s ongoing economic development. China’s Belt and

Road Initiative, along with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), seeks to connect Central Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Middle East, Africa and Europe, through infrastructure and markets necessary for China’s supply chain.

To miss this opportunity would cost China dearly, and without stability and peace in Afghanistan, China will struggle to benefit from the desired outcome. China’s direct financial investments – Today China is the biggest foreign investor in Afghanistan, having acquired the US\$4.4-billion extraction contract to develop the Mes Aynak copper mines. Even with increased investment in the mining sector, China has been unable to operate fully, due to continuing conflict and insecurity in the country. Stability in Afghanistan would help China, with a large economy that relies on energy and raw materials, while helping Afghanistan end its dependence on international assistance. ... **P3**

Saudi Arabia Funds Multi-Million UNHCR Programme For Returnees in Afghanistan

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) have launched a \$10 million programme with the financial support of the Saudi Arabian government, aimed at reintegrating returnees and internally displaced people in Afghanistan. The project aims to provide essential services to facilitate community development. Construction will start

on 37 schools, health clinics, and infrastructure projects like roads and water networks across Afghanistan. "The government is firmly committed to ensuring the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of all displaced Afghans. It constitutes one of our highest national priorities," said Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, head of MoRR. The programme was launched in June 2020, helping some 3 million people

and is expected to be completed by May 2021. Saudi Arabia is funding up to 14 projects in Bamiyan, Kabul, Nangarhar and Kandahar. "We are grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for this very generous donation for supporting the people of Afghanistan," said Caroline Van Buren, UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan.

All the projects are in 20 priority areas identified by the government for return and reintegration where returnees and displaced people are living among local communities. There are 4.6 million Afghans outside Afghanistan, of whom 2.7 million are registered refugees. Collectively, they represent one of the longest-displaced, longest-dispossessed populations worldwide.

Nearly 6,000 Afghan...

which AGE group was responsible," the report read. "This also corresponds with a decrease in the number of incidents for which the Taliban or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) claimed responsibility."

Pressure-plate IEDs, used by the Taliban, function in Afghanistan as anti-personnel landmines continued to cause serious harm to civilians. The report stated that of the civilians killed by such devices, 31 percent were children and 12 percent were women.

UNAMA called on the Taliban to meet its commitments and "cease using these illegal weapons that wreak such harm on Afghan civilians."

The mission said it also remains concerned about attacks deliberately targeting civilians, including education, health and humanitarian workers, members of the judiciary, tribal elders, religious leaders and civilian government employees.

However, ground engagements, mainly between the Taliban and the Afghan national security forces, caused the most civilian casualties, responsible for more than one-third of all civilian casualties.

This was followed by suicide and non-suicide IEDs (29 percent), targeted killings (16 percent) and airstrikes (eight percent).

Pro-Government Forces (PGFs) were responsible for more than a quarter of all civilian casualties - 28 percent and Afghan national security forces (ANSF) were responsible for 23 percent of all civilian casualties; a similar number was recorded in the first nine months of 2019.

UNAMA said almost half of civilian casualties by PGFs is caused by indirect fire, such as howitzers, mortars, rockets and grenades, often used in civilian-populated areas. "Women and children comprise almost three out of four civilian casualties from the use of these weapons by PGFs, as the projectiles often land near, or on, civilian homes," read the report.

The mission said it was also concerned about the 70 percent increase of civilian casualties caused by Afghan Air Force airstrikes that accounted for most of the airstrike civilian casualties, which overall amounted to eight percent of civilian casualties. On the issue of peace talks, UNAMA said the negotiations offer an opportunity for parties to the conflict to consider the irreversible loss and devastating effect that the war has had on Afghans, to acknowledge this with victims, and to address their rights to truth, justice, compensation, and reparation for the harm suffered.

"Our interviews with victims and their families reveal the near complete failure of parties to the conflict to acknowledge harm caused, nor even to make contact with them following an incident," said Fiona Frazer, UNAMA's Human Rights chief. "The parties could, at minimum, acknowledge the pain caused, and look toward ways to help build reconciliation among the millions of Afghans who have suffered loss but whom desire an acknowledgement of what has happened to them, and a sustainable peace."

Afghan Women...

on January 2004 by Loya Jirga. The constitution provides the framework for the government which is defined into three branches; Executive, Judiciary, and Legislative. The Executive branch consist of a president, who is directly elected by Afghan people for a term of five-years. After the Taliban regime when Hamid Karzai was elected as the President, women had no executive seats. However, there were a subsequent number of female ministers. Later, on 2004 one female candidate stood for the election among her male counterparts. For election 2014 there were no female presidential candidate, but couple of vice-presidential candidates. The Judiciary branch consist of Supreme Court (دستور محکمه), the High court, and Appeal court. The Supreme Court is composed of nine members appointed by the President and approval of the Lower House of Parliament (ولسلی جرگه) for a period of ten-years. The High Council of Supreme court has not had a women member since established which is considered a key issue results marginalizing women's political participation. The Legislative branch is comprised of House of Elders (مشرانو جرگه) and House of the People (ولسلی جرگه). Within each legislative body women are seated in accordance to Afghanistan's constitution and electoral law. In 2009 women held 21.6% of the House of Elders, while since 2019 they hold 27% of the Lower House. The Afghan legislature is composed of 28% women underlining it as one the major female legislators' structure across the Asia. The above number indicates more quantity effect than of quality impact on women's political and economic participation. The current peace talks should gear the country toward supporting the culture of peace and inclusivity. The majority of Afghans has been secluded from

the table including the full integration of women in peace process. Those in power - ranging from the political elite to local leaders to civil servants - are likely to only be concerned about how a potential power-sharing agreement will affect their power and access to patronage networks, meaning that women will not be viewed as vital participants unless it is beneficial to them. All indications suggest that the United States is simply attempting to broker an agreement that will reduce violence and allow for a withdrawal of troops, not safeguarding or providing basic rights for women and more marginalized religious and ethnic communities. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent announcement that Washington will cut \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan if an inclusive government is not formed in Kabul makes clear that the United States is tired of the zero-sum attitudes of Afghan politicians and is using the aid as leverage to focus on getting out of the country. Moreover, Pompeo has made clear time and again that it is not the responsibility of the United States to ensure that women and other minorities are included in the negotiations. Based on recent surveys more women inclines to work in offices and live independently, while this culture is not fully approved by the Taliban. In Afghanistan, the perception of whether women are viewed as victims or agents is based on distorted cultural elements. The perception of women is not fueled by cultural heritage, but rather a culture of war that has been accepted and pushed by oppressive actors, both domestic and foreign. In the mid-20th century, Afghanistan had a progressive outlook on women and movement toward equal rights was steady. Women were granted the right to vote in 1919, a year

before the United States had equal suffrage. When a new constitution was ratified in the 1960s, women were key authors who brought gender equality to many aspects of their lives. The violence that followed, the growth of extremist ideologies, and the rule of the Taliban all contributed to limiting women's agency by banning them from public life and service. For years, women were not allowed to leave their homes without a male chaperone and young girls were not able to study. Therefore, the current state of women has not been perpetual throughout time. Afghanistan is in a temporary period in history that is defined by a culture of war and extremism instead of peace and moderation. But since 2001 there have been transition toward a modernized Afghanistan with equal opportunity for all. The National Action Plan launched in 2015 paved the path for more women involvement in position and power. After all the progress still 21 members of peace process, who were rejected by Taliban, five of them were women. Women tends to have stake and speak out for their rights. They want to reign their future by holding the power during the power-sharing arrangements. Subsequently, Afghan Women have launched different projects to withstand their opinion, negotiate firmly, and ensure their privileges and liberation they gained after decades of war and conflict. A peace agreement must explicitly allow women's rights groups and NGOs to continue operating without restriction; their staff must be further empowered and protected from persecution and unjust treatment in the name of Sharia or local traditions. If an end to the conflict is the genuine goal of the warring parties and their backers, they will respond to women's demands and place women at the center, not the margins, of their efforts.

Can China Bring...

If China is to become the leader in Central Asia area it aspires to be, it will have to utilise its strong and enduring relationship with Islamabad to increase Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan's affairs by putting pressure on Pakistan to play a constructive role in the Afghan-Taliban talks. Pakistan, China's "all-weather friend", is still in the best position to put pressure

on the Taliban to reduce its use of violence. Beijing invited Taliban representatives to China in September of last year, and one month later announced that it would host intra-Afghan talks, but the event never materialised. China's leaders have long expressed support for peace negotiations, and media reports have suggested that Beijing is prepared to join Pakistan as a "guarantor" of

the peace agreement. "As long as there is an opportunity, China will promote peace talks in a private way," according to Dr. Shi Yinhong, foreign affairs adviser to China's State Council. China also claims to continue to "closely cooperate" with all parties for reconciliation, if required. As such, China's potential contribution could well be accepted by all parties in the peacebuilding process.

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China says U.S. attacks on China won't make America 'great again'

China refuted a recent 'false claim' by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft on China's cooperation with UN, saying that interfering in China's internal affairs won't help solve America's own problems or make America 'great again,' according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

At Tuesday's regular press briefing, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that the article, titled "How Team Trump is fighting China's ploys to control the UN," published by Craft last week with the New York Post is full of "ignorance and prejudice" of some U.S. politicians.

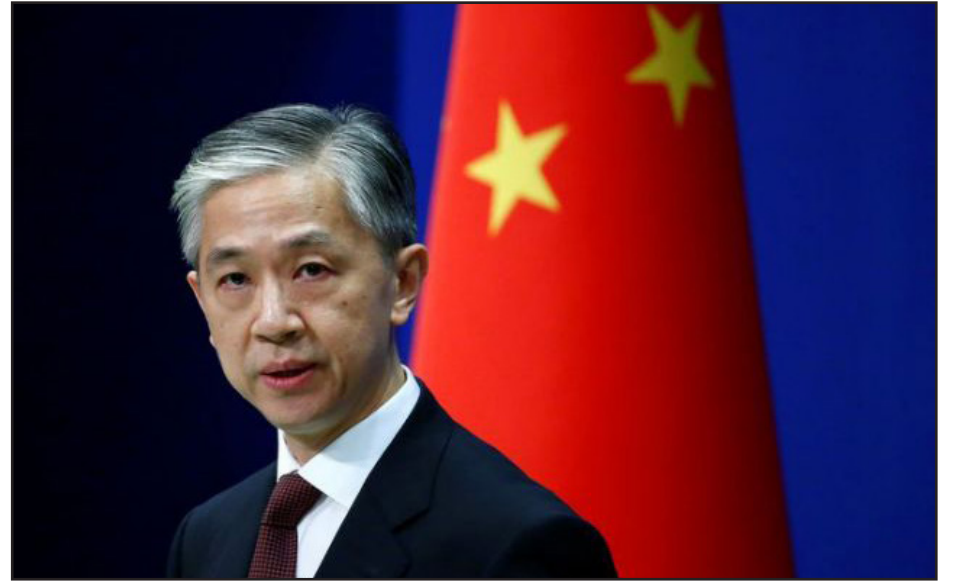
The foreign ministry spokesperson said that China has been firmly upholding multilateralism and supporting the work of the UN, safeguarding the purposes and

principles of the UN Charter.

Using issues such as China's Taiwan affairs to interfere in China's internal affairs has violated international law and the basic principles guiding international relations, he said.

Wang said that Craft's claims in the article are groundless and urged the U.S. to do the right thing as the U.S. is pointing fingers at other countries' cooperation with UN while pursuing unilateralism itself.

As mankind facing more and more global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Wang added, the only way to solve problems is having equal dialogue and negotiations, strengthening international cooperation, and jointly safeguarding multilateralism and the international system at the core of the UN.



A look at the world

Thousands in Bangladesh protest against French cartoons

A movement to boycott French products has gained momentum in Bangladesh, the world's third-largest Muslim majority state, following President Emmanuel Macron's comments supporting the republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad.

The 2015 Charlie Hebdo caricatures have once again come under the limelight after a French teacher, Samuel Patty, was killed last week by a Chechen-origin teenager after he displayed the cartoons in his class on free speech. The attacker was shot dead by police.

Last Wednesday, Macron said he will not prevent the publishing of the cartoons under the pretext of freedom of speech



sparkling outrage among the Muslim world. French Muslims have accused him of trying to repress their religion and legitimizing Islamophobia.

Several Arab countries as well as Turkey and Pakistan have also condemned Macron's attitude toward Muslims and Islam, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saying the French leader needs a "mental health check."

In Bangladesh, tens of thousands of protesters launched a march toward the French Embassy in Dhaka on Tuesday to register their strong reservations against the remarks and called on people to boycott French products.

The country is a major consumer of French perfumes and cosmetics.

Speakers at a Sunday rally in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka called on the French president to apologize for his remarks.

"As one of the top-ranking European countries, France knows very well that Prophet Muhammad is the greatest leader for Muslims across the world," Khalilur Rahman Madani, convener of Joint Islamic Parties, told Anadolu Agency. He termed the movement to boycott ... **P2**

Yemen rebels claim attack on Saudi airport



Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed to have launched a drone attack on an airport in southern Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Rebel spokesman Yahya Saree said an "important target" at the Abha International Airport was the focus on the drone attack, without giving any further details.

"The strike was accurate," he said, vowing to pursue rebel attacks "as long as the aggression and blockade on Yemen continue".

There was no comment from the Saudi-led coalition on the rebel claim.

The Houthis regularly announce rocket and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's southern regions in retaliation to coalition attacks in Yemen.

On Saturday, the Saudi-led coalition said they had shot down six Houthi drones fired toward Saudi Arabia.

Yemen has been beset by violence and chaos since 2014, when Houthi rebels overran much of the country, including the capital Sanaa. The crisis escalated in 2015 when the Saudi-led coalition launched a devastating air campaign aimed at rolling back Houthi territorial gains.

More than 100,000 Yemenis, including civilians, are believed to have been killed in the conflict, which has led to the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions at risk of starvation.

Iran's oil minister slams U.S. sanctions

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh on Monday condemned US sanctions against him and his colleagues.

Zanganeh described the move as "a passive reaction to the failure of Washington's policy of reducing [Iran's] crude oil exports to zero." "Iran's oil industry will not be hamstrung," he wrote on Twitter, criticizing US unilateralism. "I have no assets outside of Iran to be subject to the sanctions."

The US on Monday imposed sanctions on Iran's Petroleum Ministry along with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC). Eleven entities, eight individuals including Zanganeh and two vessels were sanctioned by President Donald Trump's administration



for their alleged financial support to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the Treasury Department said in a statement.

Four of them were involved in the recent sale of Iranian gasoline to Venezuela.

The entities include National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC), Iranian Oil Pipelines and Telecommunications Company, National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company, Abadan Oil Refining Company, Imam Khomeini Shazand Oil Refining Company and the National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

The designated individuals include NIOC Managing Director Masoud Karbasian, NITC Managing Director Nasrollah Sardashti, NIORDC Director Alireza Sadiqabadi and NPC Managing Director Behzad Mohammadi.

The vessels Longbow Lake and Wu Xian were also sanctioned due to their links to NIOC. Ties between the US and Iran have been on a knife's edge since 2018, when Washington unilaterally withdrew from a nuclear deal with Tehran despite international opposition.



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