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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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## India to Send 500,000 Doses of COVID19 Vaccine to Afghanistan

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) says India has pledged to help Afghanistan with 500,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine.

MoPH on Monday held a meeting with the participation of the Deputy Minister for Policy and Planning, Dr. Bashir Noormal and representatives of World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF on implementing the Coronavirus vaccines made in India. Dr. Bashir Noormal said that with the supply of Indian COVID19 vaccines, 250,000 people are to be vaccinated in the country.

Dr. Noormal has called on the Corona Vaccine Implementing Authorities to take the necessary measures to implement the Corona Vaccine made in India. ... **P3**



## U.S. Embassy in Kabul to Begin a Phased Resumption of Immigrant Visa Interviews by Feb

The US embassy in Kabul has announced that it will begin a phased resumption of immigrant visa interviews by early February.

“The initial phase will involve rescheduling applicants who had their interviews canceled due to the U.S. Embassy’s Consular Section halting in person appearances because of COVID,” the US embassy said in a series of tweets. The US embassy said that once the phase is complete, the U.S. Embassy’s Consular Section, in coordination with the National Visa Center, will resume scheduling new immigrant visa appointments for applications that are documentarily complete.

According to US embassy, the Consular Section will schedule applicants in the order that they became documentarily qualified and will not have capacity for expedited appointments.

“Due to ongoing COVID-mitigation measures, the Embassy will have ... **P3**

# SIGAR: Smugglers Use VIP Security Bypass at Kabul Airport



The U.S. Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in a report published on Jan. 14 says that since the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, cash smuggling out of Afghanistan’s international air and land ports has been a concern for the Afghan government, the United States, and the international community. This latest report details the specific means by which some smuggling is accomplished at the Kabul airport.

A U.S. watchdog has reported that at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, non-VIP passengers go through

five checkpoints and six inspection sites, while very important people (VIP) or commercially important person (CIP) passengers are screened only once and VVIPs are not screened at all.

The report says that the principal difference between the screening processes for non-VIP and VIP/VVIP passengers is the level of screening and scrutiny. Vehicles transport a VIP passenger directly to the VIP terminal, bypassing the first four checkpoints/inspection sites, the report says.

The VIP terminal also lacks most of the additional stages in the security

process that a traveler in the non-VIP passenger terminal must clear prior to boarding, the report says.

According to the report, VVIP passengers bypass all security procedures and their vehicles are cleared to drop them directly near their planes on the tarmac.

Additionally, the report says, the VIP terminal does not have a customs office, cash counting machines, or customs declaration forms. Inspectors found no signs or notices to passengers outlining the cash declaration requirements, nor thresholds or export limits.

The official accompanying the inspectors stated that if a VIP/VVIP carries more than \$10,000 (but below the \$20,000 export limit), their staff would take the money to the non-VIP terminal, have the money counted, and then bring a declaration form to the VIP/VVIP to fill out. We could not confirm whether customs procedures and declarations thresholds are enforced at the VIP terminal, the report says.

SIGAR finds that the cash counting machines had been installed but are not in regular use or connected to the Internet.

Two were in the non-VIP passengers’ departure area, and a third was near the non-VIP passengers’ arrival entrance, the report says.

There were no cash counting machines in the VIP terminal, the report says, adding that one of the Afghan officials present during our inspection said there have been a few instances of VIP/VVIPs transporting large amounts of cash out of the country, but “it rarely happens... as they are high officials and prestigious businessmen,” implying that they do not engage in cash smuggling.

However, in August 2020, staff in the customs office reported to SIGAR that a member of Parliament in the VIP terminal tried to smuggle around 200,000 Euros ... **P3**

## Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia Sign MoU on Academic, Educational Cooperation

Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar met with the Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Hamad bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh and discussed educational cooperation between the two countries during his visit to Saudi Arabia on Friday, a MoFA statement said on Sunday.

At the outset, Minister Atmar thanked the Saudi government for its assistance in various fields, especially in education and scholarships for Afghan students, and called for the expansion of cooperation in vocational training to Afghans in scientific and technical areas, according to the statement. ... **P3**



## 380,000 People in Afghanistan Displaced by War in 2020: OCHA

In 2020, almost 380,000 people in Afghanistan have left their homes due to fighting, many remain displaced as conflict and poverty prevent them from returning to their areas of origin, the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said. OCHA in a report said that the displacement due to ongoing conflict and natural disasters is continuing to drive humanitarian needs in Afghanistan.

According to the report, almost 380,000 people have left their homes this year due to fighting. “Many of these people remain displaced across the country, as conflict and poverty prevent them from returning to their areas of origin. In addition to this, close to 868,000 people have returned from neighbouring countries to Afghanistan so far this year including 860,000 from Iran, and 7,900 from Pakistan,” the report



reads. “Some 6,000 people has also been deported from Turkey in 2020, while a small number also returned from Europe,” the report said.

Save the Children has previously there are calls for urgent increases in humanitarian funding to Afghanistan, as figures reveal that just over 18million people, almost half the population, desperately need life-saving support.

With no immediate end in sight to the decades-long conflict, Save the Children’s Country Director in

Afghanistan Chris Nyamandi said, “Millions of people are suffering every day because of poverty and conflict. It’s especially hard on children many of whom have known nothing but violence. According to the latest UN figures, nearly 6,000 people, a third of them children, were killed and injured between January and September last year.” This comes as COVID-19 in Afghanistan is having a catastrophic impact on millions of vulnerable families in Afghanistan.

By: James B. Cunningham, Hugo Llorens

# How Biden can achieve sustainable peace and U.S. security

Among the most pressing issues on the US president-elect's to-do list on foreign policy is the war in Afghanistan, which offers only hard choices. But despite the blunders of President Donald Trump, Afghanistan may actually now have a chance to achieve some form of political settlement and significantly reduced violence.

To pursue a path toward sustainable peace in Afghanistan, Joe Biden's team must walk a fine line. On the one hand, they must make it clear that peace does not mean simply handing the country to the Taliban. It instead requires foreclosing a Taliban military victory. On the other hand, they and America's partners must keep pressure on the Afghan government to negotiate seriously with the Taliban and not think of US military or financial support as license to refuse compromise.

And the Biden team must do all this while recognizing that successful negotiations, ones that will maintain constitutional government and human—including women's—rights, will likely take a substantial period of time.

The effort to reach peace quickly in Afghanistan has led to numerous mistakes. The Trump administration repeatedly pushed the Afghan government to make concessions and fudged the United States' own positions in order to overcome deadlocks. As a result, the Taliban has added demands, made no concessions, and told Afghan government negotiators that their only role is to negotiate the surrender of their government.

With patience and determination, the Biden team should push both sides to a sustainable agreement that ends this long war. Done well, this approach will bolster US security interests in Afghanistan and the wider region. Done badly, as it has been recently,

it will leave terrorists entrenched in Afghanistan and consign Afghan men and women to a barbarous future.

At this very moment, in fact, the Taliban is seeking to take advantage of a declining security situation in the country—in which intellectuals, journalists, and civil-society leaders are being systematically murdered—and profound uncertainty among the Afghan public and elites about American policy.

The Biden team, which is likely to be preoccupied with urgent issues ranging from threats from Russia to the COVID-19 crisis to the ailing economy, needs to develop a short-term response that gives it time to consider longer-term options. If the new US administration were to announce a pause of all US troop withdrawals from Afghanistan until it determines whether the Taliban has lived up to its commitments, that would give it space to avoid losing before it even decides on its game plan.

The Trump administration's legacy The Biden team should give the Trump administration credit for creating conditions for peace. In his first year in office, although extremely skeptical of the US role in Afghanistan, Trump ultimately deferred to the advice of Defense Secretary James Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joe Dunford. The result was a well-regarded, "conditions-based" South Asia strategy enunciated in August 2017. The strategy made clear that the United States retained a strategic stake in ensuring that Afghanistan would never again become a platform for terrorists to attack the US homeland. The approach involved maintaining military pressure on the Taliban insurgents by providing US support to advise and enable Afghan security forces and by intensifying diplomatic engagement in the region,

particularly with the Taliban's chief patron, Pakistan.

Ultimately, and as intended, this multifaceted approach created the conditions for direct US-Taliban negotiations in September 2018. Led by US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, and his Taliban counterpart, Mullah Baradar, the talks yielded a February 29, 2020 agreement. While far from perfect, the historic agreement included four core elements: a commitment by the Taliban to prevent terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS-K from operating in Afghan territory; a timetable for the withdrawal of US forces by early 2021; the launch of peace talks between Afghan government officials and their Taliban counterparts; and a commitment to reducing violence, with the US and the Afghan government separately stressing the need for a ceasefire.

These significant diplomatic efforts, including the start of intra-Afghan talks in Doha, provided an unprecedented opportunity to end the conflict in Afghanistan while preserving core US security equities.

Lamentably, and against the advice of his top national-security advisers, Trump sought to advance his electoral prospects by announcing his plan to complete the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2020. The credibility of a conditions-based withdrawal was shattered. The president's reckless tweets and ill-timed interventions undermined the fragile peace talks. Additionally, Trump's team pressed the Afghan government for unilateral concessions, including the release of Taliban prisoners who may be returning to the battlefield.

Trump's signals emboldened the Taliban to intensify military operations, including targeted assassinations of officials, journalists and civil-society leaders. Moreover, reports by the

United Nations and statements by US officials, among other analysis, indicate that the Taliban has not met its commitments vis-à-vis al-Qaeda, as stipulated in the February 2020 agreement.

Biden's opportunity

Fortunately, Biden, Secretary of State-designate Tony Blinken, Secretary of Defense-designate Lloyd Austin, and incoming National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan have ample experience with Afghanistan. They understand the value of ending the fight with an agreement that provides a good chance of sustainable peace and a workable means to prevent a resurgence of international terror operations emanating from Afghanistan.

The new administration should affirm its support of the ongoing Doha peace negotiations. It should pause further US troop withdrawals until it can conduct an expedited inter-agency policy review. The review should include consultations with NATO, the European Union, and other allies who have faithfully partnered with the United States in Afghanistan. It should include a re-examination of military drawdowns not only as part of a political strategy, but also as they relate to assuring that remaining US forces, diplomats, and other personnel are secure.

We believe that several near-term diplomatic steps will become evident. In private talks with Taliban representatives in Doha, the new team should underscore that even after its policy review, the United States has no obligation under the February US-Taliban agreement to complete the full withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan until there is tangible evidence that the Taliban is fully meeting its commitments regarding al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations while also engaging

seriously in peace negotiations.

The United States should make clear that the level of US forces in Afghanistan and other US diplomatic and financial support will be linked to the Taliban and the Afghan government taking credible steps toward a significant and measurable reduction in levels of violence, if not an outright ceasefire.

These points are likely to lead to tough exchanges with the Taliban.

Biden and senior officials in his administration should make the same points to Pakistani officials. The United States should be clear that positive bilateral relations, including the resumption of military-to-military ties, will only be possible insofar as Pakistani military, intelligence, and civilian officials demonstrably use their influence with the Taliban to mitigate violence and assure that the Taliban negotiates in good faith to reach a political settlement.

The new US team should convey an unmistakable message as well to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the broader political class in Kabul that there is no blank check from Washington: Sustained US financial and military support will be linked to them doubling down on finding a creative political solution that can end hostilities. Afghan leaders from government, the opposition and civil society in Kabul must overcome the divisions that have undermined the government's ability to both negotiate effectively and achieve vital security and governance reforms.

An imperative for the Biden administration is to engage in serious strategic discussion with allies, partners, and other key actors (including China, Russia, and India) to rebuild trust and understanding after the Trump years. The same engagement is needed with Afghans. Distrust is rampant, and each side needs to find ways to understand the other. The United States and its partners must do everything possible to kick-start peace talks in early 2021. Those talks should begin to address the real substantive issues that are essential for a post-conflict ... **P3**

By SIMA SAMAR

## If the world abandons Afghanistan, the country faces catastrophe

The time has come to speak out – to everyone who has been part of rebuilding Afghanistan – to the more than 40 governments that stepped up when the Taliban were ousted in 2001, to the military men and women who brought some stability to our country, to the policy-makers and internationalists who helped us create or restore the institutions that make a country function and even prosper. And to the humanitarians who came in great numbers to help us right the many wrongs. We Afghans need you now. The future is not clear. The so-called peace negotiations are dishonest and unacceptable. Now the looming catastrophe needs to be exposed. Recently, I met with members of Afghanistan's negotiation team who are working with the Taliban. We discussed the urgency for peace, cessation of violence, respect and protection for women and journalists as well as other human-rights and civil-society activists in Afghanistan. Though the team was energetic and optimistic about the potential of the negotiations, they admitted their immense frustration

with the intransigence and rigid position of the Taliban as well as the distressing lack of unity from the Afghan government.

First, the Taliban: They will not end the violence, they disapprove of the new generation of civil society that has flourished in the past two decades and they are against human rights and certainly the rights of women. What's more, we now know that the Taliban had planned to use force as a means to gain points at the negotiation table. And now, predictably they are claiming that the peace negotiations won't work until the current president of Afghanistan steps down.

Second, the government: They describe President Ashraf Ghani as a man who has started acting like a dictator and is not respecting the rule of law, the constitution or human rights and women's rights. They claim there is a lack of political will to stop the rampant corruption in the government and the endless political bickering, which seriously undermines the position of the negotiation team in Doha. Afghan people are watching this

peace process initiated by the United States and now including talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In the past 43 years of war, Afghans have never been closer to the possibility of having peace than they are now. I and many Afghans see this as a golden opportunity to end conflict and therefore we have contributed all our efforts to support this process to its successful end.

However, in order to protect the peace process and not endanger the investments made from all sides, I want to draw the world's attention to a few crucial points.

- The agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban does not address the voices and demands of the Afghan people who are being targeted and killed more than ever before. (On Sunday, for instance, two female Supreme Court judges were assassinated in Kabul; the gunmen remain unidentified.)
- To have sustainable results, the peace process requires more time and more determination by both sides.
- The May 20 withdrawal deadline should be revisited because the

end of war and conflict cannot be defined by a deadline, but by the realities and conditions on the ground.

- The Taliban must be specific in stating a change in their policy, especially regarding women's rights and freedom of speech. Currently their policies are as harsh as they were between 1996-2001.

- Although Afghanistan is not a stable country and relies heavily on foreign aid, the country has begun to form strong institutions for democracy and for providing equal rights for men and women in the Constitution, and for having a flourishing free media.

- Our fledgling democracy is at stake – we need our international partners to intervene. An insecure Afghanistan is not only a threat to Afghans, but to the whole world because an unstable Afghanistan could become a breeding ground for terrorism sponsored by different states, including our neighbouring countries.

- To avoid another 9/11, the U.S. must not prematurely withdraw from Afghanistan. Afghanistan's security must be considered an essential element of U.S. national security.

- The Afghan President must respect

the constitution of Afghanistan, the rule of law and work for Afghan unity and peace, which must include the protection of women, journalists, human-rights defenders, civil-society activists and the rights of minorities.

- Our politicians must stop political bickering and work to unite the country.

- Peace negotiations must have the support of the people of Afghanistan. An immediate ceasefire is required to turn cynicism into optimism and to create a culture for peace that includes closure, acknowledgement, reparation, restitution and protection from victimization.

The country is in turmoil. People have lost faith. They have suffered enough. If those who supported us from the beginning now turn their attention to the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to demand they both come to the table with the common good of the Afghan people on their minds, we can move forward; in fact, we can flourish. Then the international community can be proud of its accomplishments in Afghanistan instead of having to watch a peace process that is dishonest and doomed to fail.

# Qataris Eye More Investment in Farah: Govt

Qatari business people are seeking to invest in the western Afghan province of Farah with an aim to upgrade the provincial airfield into an international airport, an Afghan official said Sunday.

The industry and commerce minister, Nisar Ahmad Ghoryani, addressing a press conference on Sunday, said that Chinese, Iranian and European investors are in Kabul to review investment opportunities in the country.

Last May, Algharrafa Foundation, a Qatari organization, provided \$1 million worth of aid and pledged to build a hospital in Farah province. Qatari businesspeople have also

invested in the agricultural sector in Farah province over the last three years.

Qatari institutions have also invested in Kabul. Last December, officials held a ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of a township by the Al-Gharafa Foundation in Kabul.

The \$110-million township will be built on 6 hectares of land in Kabul's Khoshal Khan area.

The minister said Qataris want to build infrastructure in Farah and open the way for the export of products from the province to international destinations.

"They are ready to make the Farah

airport international and work on (building) cold storage facilities where all products are kept and then sent abroad," Ghoryani said.

Meanwhile, Economy Minister Karima Hamid Faryabi said that the country's economic growth is expected to increase 2.5 to 3% this fiscal year, but this will not be enough to make a serious difference in economic health.

"This rate of economic growth is less compared with the speedy growth in population and will not have a significant impact on the reduction of poverty, job creation and access to basic services," Faryabi said.

Industry owners said that insecurity,

lack of electricity and other problems have plagued their businesses and have lowered investment in industries by 50 percent.

"Lack of sufficient electricity, wrong policies by neighboring countries, the influx of imported goods, the smuggling of goods, all have resulted in the bottoming-out of investments," said Nasir Reshtia, CEO of an industrial union.

But the industry and commerce minister said that despite the fact that many businesses have left the country, the interest in investment has increased in Afghanistan recently as 300 factories are on the verge of being established.

### India to Send...

According to him, people at risk are a priority for the Ministry of Public Health to receive the corona vaccine, and they will be vaccinated at the first stage.

The Ministry of Public Health has not specified when the Indian-made vaccine will arrive in Afghanistan.

India has launched a major global vaccination campaign which around 1.3 billion people are expected to be vaccinated in the country by the end of the campaign.

### U.S. Embassy...

a reduced appointment capacity," the embassy said.

"The health and safety of applicants and staff will be the first priority as the Consular Section resumes visa interviews and may require future cancellations or reductions in appointments," the US embassy asserted.

"Applicants with a pending appointment or with a case that is ready for scheduling may still face significant delays. Nonimmigrant visa interviews remain suspended due to COVID," the embassy added.

### Afghanistan, Saudi...

Welcoming the Foreign Minister, Dr. Hamad bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh said, "We want to be your partner in the transition to a new chapter in Afghanistan." The Saudi Minister of Education expressed readiness to increase the number of scholarships for undergraduate and graduate programs paving the way for professional and specialized education for Afghans. He noted that Saudi Arabia can help Afghanistan through teacher training and curriculum development using the latest models and experiences.

At the end of the meeting, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on academic and educational cooperation between the Ministries of Education of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia. This MoU will increase the mutual visits of education officials and student delegations of the two countries. It also increases the attention to Arabic language teaching for those interested in Afghanistan.

### SIGAR: Smugglers...

(approximate value of \$238,000) in cash out of the airport.

Inspectors confirmed that the cash-counting machine in the passenger arrival entrance works.

However, they could not test the two machines in the departure area because airport customs staff there did not know how to operate them.

Therefore, the only working cash counting machine is in the arrival entrance, instead of the departure area where strict cash controls are most needed to prevent cash smuggling.

Despite efforts by the Afghan government to reduce the flow of cash out of the country's busiest international airport, significant control weaknesses continue to exist.

To improve screening procedures at Hamid Karzai International Airport, SIGAR suggests the Afghan government consider taking the following two actions: Fully integrate cash counting machines with functioning

Internet capability, and strengthen controls at the VIP terminal by requiring all VIP and WVIP passengers to fill out customs declaration forms, and have airport staff count any cash declared and send serial numbers to FinTRACA.

Background

A 2011 Congressional Research Service study estimated that up to \$4.5 billion was smuggled out of the country in a single year. According to a 2015 study by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 65 percent of all cash leaving Afghanistan was "illegally earned, transferred" or used. A significant portion of that cash is tied to the opium trade, of which Afghanistan produced 84 percent of the world's supply from 2015 to 2020, the report says.

Up to 85 percent of this poppy production occurs in areas controlled or influenced by the Taliban, and the drug trade finances as much as half of the group's activities in Afghanistan. To track serial numbers of cash going in and out of

Afghanistan's busiest airport, the US government installed cash counting machines at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in 2011.

The following year, SIGAR reported that customs officials rarely used the machines, and did not record and send serial number data to the proper Afghan authorities.

SIGAR also reported that senior government officials and other individuals with political influence, designated by the president's office as very important persons (VIP), were exempted from the customs process.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs in response said that some individuals have been arrested on charges of attempting to smuggle money through the airport.

"This issue is serious for us. We will conduct our assessments in this respect. Any attempt to smuggle money through the (Hamid Karzai) airport in Kabul will be prevented," said the ministry.

### How Biden can...

governing framework. All this will require patience. The reaction to every impasse must not be yielding to Taliban demands.

To facilitate the negotiations, the United States should seriously consider proposing that both sides agree to an acceptable independent third-country mediator. Such a setup would help the parties work through the very complex and divisive issues to be negotiated.

While the primary driver of US interests in Afghanistan and South and Central Asia is US security, the Biden administration should reassert the relevance of American values. The United States should reiterate its support for the basic tenets of Afghanistan's liberal constitution, which has made possible impressive gains over the past twenty years in democratic governance, women's empowerment, enabling rights of ethnic minorities, and freedom of the press and assembly. This is fully consistent with Biden's strong support for America's role in

upholding democracy around the world.

It is important to recognize that a durable peace in Afghanistan will not be achievable unless a governance framework is in place to advance the rights of the population and create conditions for the achievement of social justice and sustainable economic growth.

Economic progress will depend on continued international support for Afghanistan, as the November 2020 Geneva donor conference made clear. The United States and its international partners should fully use the leverage of their vital economic and development support to influence Taliban and government behavior and performance.

For the new Biden team, the opportunity is clear: a determined, patient approach can yield a good outcome for US and Afghan interests. The size and cost of the US presence in Afghanistan have been vastly reduced, and the two sides are now talking. Skilled diplomacy, the effective use of assistance and military tools, and support

from its partners can help guide Afghanistan to a peace that the vast majority of its citizens desire while reinforcing US security interests and America's international standing.

James B. Cunningham served as ambassador to Afghanistan, Israel, and the United Nations as well as deputy ambassador in Kabul. Hugo Llorens served as ambassador to Honduras, assistant chief of mission in Afghanistan, and special chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan.

Ronald E. Neumann served as ambassador to Algeria, Bahrain, and Afghanistan (to which he returns frequently) and is president of the American Academy of Diplomacy. Richard Olson served as special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, ambassador to Pakistan, director for economic and assistance affairs in Kabul, and ambassador to the UAE.

Earl Anthony Wayne served as deputy ambassador and director for economic and assistance affairs in Kabul, ambassador to Mexico and Argentina, and assistant secretary of state for economic and business affairs.

### Exchange Rates

77.05	\$	77.15
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# EU foreign ministers discussing Russia, int'l issues

EU foreign ministers convened a meeting in Brussels on Monday to discuss several international issues, including the detention of opposition politician Alexey Navalny and protestors in Russia and transatlantic relations in wake of the inauguration of new US president. "First, we'll deal with the worrying events in Russia. More than 3,000 people have been reportedly arrested. This wave of detention is something that worries us a lot, as well as the detention of Mr. Navalny, so we are going to start by this issue," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a doorstep statement ahead of the first EU Foreign Affairs Council of 2021. Tens of thousands of people on Saturday gathered in Russia to protest Navalny's detention, demanding his immediate release. Many people supporting Navalny were detained in the country when police intervened the protestors harshly. Navalny, 44, who received treatment in Germany

after alleged poisoning, was arrested in the Russian capital Moscow upon his return on Jan. 17. Russian authorities said he had violated probation terms from a suspended sentence on a 2014 money laundering offence, which Navalny says is "politically motivated". Less than 25 hours after his return, Moscow's Khimki Court ruled that Navalny would remain in custody on a 30-day pre-trial detention. He is now behind bars in Moscow's infamous Matrosskaya Tishina jail. EU-Turkey relations EU foreign ministers will also address relations with Turkey, Borrell said. "We have the relationship with Turkey [on the agenda] after the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr [Mevlut] Cavusoglu to Brussels," the EU official stated. The death of Italian student Giulio Regeni in Egypt, transatlantic relations after the inauguration of



US President Joe Biden, and post-Brexit relations with the UK on foreign policy, security, and defense will be discussed as well, Borrell added. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi is expected to join the meeting via video link for

an exchange on "Japan's Indo-Pacific vision and regional security in Asia." The ministers will also discuss climate change and European Green Deal, and the council is expected to adopt conclusions on this topic.

### A look at the world

#### China to promote fair distribution, use of COVID-19 vaccines globally: Zhao Lijian



China will continue to promote the fair distribution and use of COVID-19 vaccines globally, said Zhao Lijian, spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at a regular briefing in Beijing on Monday.

"Virus is the common enemy of mankind, and a task of top priority for the international community is to get united as one and join the efforts to fight the pandemic. COVID-19 vaccines are global public products. Now several vaccines have become available to the market around the world. It should be up to each country's independent decision as to which vaccine it opts to use, and there should be neither cutthroat competitions nor so-called 'confrontations' on this matter. We hope and welcome more countries to produce more safe and effective vaccines faster and make them available to more developing countries so as to benefit more people," said Zhao.

"China is earnestly fulfilling its commitment to making COVID-19 vaccines global public products, and carry out international cooperation with other countries, especially developing countries, on the vaccines in different forms. We will offer our support and assistance to them within our capabilities according to their demands. We will continue to promote the fair distribution and use of the vaccines, and strive to benefit more people," said Zhao. (CCTVPlus)

#### Macron-Biden phone call underlines 'great convergence'



French president Emmanuel Macron noted "great convergence of views" on multilateral issues and international security in his first call with the new US president, Joe Biden.

In a statement late Sunday, the Elysee Palace said Macron had a "friendly and in-depth working conversation" and "underlined his determination to act alongside the US to implement common goals." The special relationship between France and the US under Donald Trump's presidency blew hot and cold as the two leaders turned from friend to foe in full public glare.

In 2018, Trump attacked Macron in a series of tweets citing the French president's "low approval rating" and replicating his slogan with "Make France Great Again," after attending the centenary commemoration of World War I.

Macron in response said France was not a "vassal state." On other occasions, meetings between the two leaders were marked with awkward smiles and intense handshakes.

The press release said Macron and Biden hoped to work on global health under the WHO framework, and on climate change under the Paris Agreement from which Trump had withdrawn.

It noted in particular the convergences and will to act together "on the Iranian nuclear issue and on the situation in Lebanon," which the readout from the White House made no mention of.


Last week, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian remarked that there was an urgent need for Washington to return to the 2015 nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed by the US and European countries with Iran, as the latter was in the process of building up its nuclear weapons capacity.

The White House shared Biden's commitment to bolstering the transatlantic relationship through NATO and the EU, as well as working on shared foreign policy priorities, including China, the Middle East, Russia, and the Sahel.


## German aid to Afghan children helped 7,500 families in Kabul

AC German Aid for Afghan Children has distributed food packages, blankets and warm jackets for children in north of Kabul for refugees in Qunduz, Baghlan, and Mazar Sharif. The families helped today were completely homeless. The assistant director of GAAC MUSTAFA shahab said! This program will continue. The donations are provided by president of GAAC BY THE NAME OF Dr.Reinhard Eros and his family. GAAC has started corona distribution program since start of corona quarantine, till this date GAAC has distributed more 10.000 food packages and hygiene kits.






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