

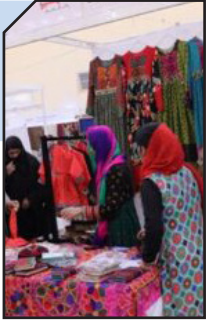


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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**Ghani Meets with Dostum after more than Two Years**

Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, the former first vice president, met with President Ashraf Ghani on Monday evening, for the first time in more than two and half years.

The two sides discussed the current political and security situation, the Afghan peace process, and the emergence of a national consensus for the success of the process, Dostum's office said in a statement.

According to the statement, the two sides emphasized preserving the hard-won achievements of the past 20 years. Dostum briefed Ghani of the security situation in Kabul and Northern provinces, stating: "Practical plans are needed for the clearance of the Faryab-Mazar and Kunduz-Kabul highways." Meanwhile, Ghani welcomed Dostum's security plans and called for the ideas to be implemented.

The meeting comes after ...

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**UK Army Chief of Defense, Pakistani General Discuss Afghan Peace Process**

UK Army's Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter called on Pakistani Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, a statement issued by the country's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated on Tuesday.

As per ISPR, matters of mutual interests including the Afghan peace process, as well as evolving global geostrategic environment were discussed.

The visiting dignitary acknowledged Pakistan's continuous efforts for peace and stability in the region and pledged to further enhance bilateral relations between both countries.

Earlier, United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad called on General Bajwa at the General Headquarters. During the meeting, matters pertaining to the regional security situation and the Afghan peace process were discussed.

## Russia to Host Meeting on Afghanistan's Peace Process



Russian Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov has invited Afghan officials to participate in a peace meeting in Moscow next week.

In a letter sent to officials, which

has been seen by Ariana News, Kabulov states the meeting will be held on March 18 and will include Afghan officials, politicians and representatives from the Taliban.

Among the politicians invited are

former president Hamid Karzai, Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Mohammad Karim Khalili, Younus Qanooni, and Sayed Mansur Naderi.

Two representatives of government

and two from the High Council for National Reconciliation have been invited.

In addition, Moscow has also invited five Taliban representatives and a number of leaders of political parties. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to inaugurate the meeting which aims to accelerate the peace process in order to end the conflict in Afghanistan.

"Qatar envoys will also participate in the meeting as proud guests," read the letter.

This push for peace coincides with current efforts on Washington's part to find ways to resolve the 20-year-old war.

Last week, US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in the region, stopping first in Kabul where he laid out the Biden administration's plans for a peace process.

In a letter sent to President Ashraf Ghani and to HCNR Chairman Abdullah Abdullah, the US proposed an interim government.

The plan has however been received with mixed reactions by Afghan government, while the Taliban, which was also handed the plan, said they are reviewing it.

**Rolla Ghani Calls Women's Economic Growth Effective for Improving Political Situation**

Rolla Ghani, Afghanistan's first lady, has called for an increase in the economic role of women, calling it effective in economic development and reducing violence against women.

The first lady has said that women's economic growth is not only constructive in reducing violence against women, but also in improving the political situation and economic development.

Rolla Ghani criticized the ...

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## Deborah Lyons to meet Khalilzad in Qatar

Deborah Lyons, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is due to arrive in Qatar Today to discuss efforts to accelerate the peace process with the Afghan government and the Taliban, sources told Reuters.

Zalmay Khalilzad has recently traveled to Doha following his trip to Pakistan, he has been visiting the region to push the Biden administration's plans for peace that also includes interim government. Qatari officials, Lyons and Khalilzad are expected to meet in Doha, sources told Reuters.

According to Reuters, the meetings are crucial as it decides the fate of peace talks to whether continue or be under a moratorium.

This comes as the Russian ambassador, Zamir Kabulov invited Afghan officials to participate in a peace meeting to be hosted in



Moscow by next week.

Media outlets in Afghanistan reported that in a leaked letter Kabulov indicated that the meeting will be held on March 18 and it will include Afghan officials, politicals and Taliban representatives.

Among the invited politicians are Sayed Mansur Naderi, Marshal Dostum, former president Hamid Karzai, Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf,

Karim Khalili, and Younus Qanooni. Two representatives from the government and two from High Council for National Reconciliations are also invited.

Moscow also have sent their invitation to invite five Taliban representatives and numer of political leaders, Sergey Lavrov Russia's Foreign Minister is expected to inaugurate the meeting. ...

P3



### Turkey,...

Uzbekistan, Uzbek Foreign Minister said, "Uzbekistan held the meetings of Joint Strategic Planning Group and the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council with only Turkey."

"There are very important issues on our agenda, and we aim to take strategic cooperation to the next level," he said.

Kamilov also said that they would hold the Strategic Planning Group's second meeting and discuss the preparation for the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council meeting.

He stated that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev would also receive Cavusoglu, and the Turkish foreign minister would meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade Sardor Umurzakov.

Noting that Cavusoglu learned the Uzbek language very well during his three-day visit, Kamilov added, "Once again, you are welcome to Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan is your second home. You are well-known and appreciated in your fatherland, Uzbekistan."

### Ghani Meets...

Dostum returned to Kabul in late February after a 20-month absence.

Dostum was welcomed back by Abdullah Abdullah Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Presidential Advisor for Security and Political Affairs, and several prominent Afghan figures at Kabul's Hamid Karzai Airport.

By Madiha Afzal and Michael O'Hanlon

# Why Staying in Afghanistan is the Least Bad Choice for Biden

The White House reportedly has a new idea on how to try, after watching peace talks in Qatar between the Afghan government and the Taliban flounder over the past year. It is proposing an international summit including Afghan leaders and the Taliban. The initial goal would be to create an interim power-sharing government, which would buy time for more comprehensive peace talks thereafter. This would also allow the United States and NATO to keep their small military footprint in place for a while longer, beyond the May cutoff that some believe the February 2020 deal between Washington and the Taliban requires. Unfortunately, this diplomatic Hail Mary is very unlikely to produce a quick accord. Whatever leverage President Biden can generate over Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, including the implied threat of a quick U.S. and NATO troop departure, the Taliban is unlikely to accept the demand for a 90-day reduction in violence. Its leaders are also unlikely to agree to meaningful power-sharing — especially if they sense we are already halfway out the door.

Thus, Biden will still likely have to decide: Do we stay or do we go? We believe that the correct answer is to stay. As difficult as it is to remain in this longest war, the most likely outcome of pulling out of Afghanistan would be very ugly, including ethnic cleansing, mass slaughter and the ultimate dismemberment of the country.

In weighing the United States' options, the president certainly needs to bear in mind the costs of the current U.S. deployment — 2,500 U.S. troops out of a NATO-mission total of 9,000, perhaps \$10 billion per year in expense to the U.S. taxpayers, and the prospect of perhaps 10 to 20 American casualties a year if the Taliban resumes its previous use of force against U.S. forces. But Biden also needs to form an expectation of what would likely happen after any NATO departure. First, if we pull out the remaining U.S. troops, those of other foreign nations will leave, too. NATO depends on the United States for key combat and intelligence capabilities and leadership.

Second, despite the departure of troops, U.S. and NATO military assistance in the form of money and equipment will likely continue to flow to Afghan government forces. After all, why would we abandon them after fighting alongside them for 20 years? Thus, both the Taliban and Kabul will have the wherewithal to maintain the fight. The war will continue, and it will



move into Afghanistan's cities, which have generally remained under government control throughout the past two decades.

Third, no rapid progress towards a peace accord will occur. Taliban leaders will be more certain than ever that time is on their side. The Ghani government will still believe it has leverage and legitimacy by virtue of its constitution, as well as international diplomatic recognition and financial support. Their fundamental ideological differences remain: The Taliban wants an Islamist emirate, Kabul wants a democratic government.

Fourth, while existing battlefield dynamics already favor the Taliban, those dynamics could be exacerbated after a U.S. and NATO departure — with terrible humanitarian consequences. As some cities fall to partial or complete Taliban control, and the Taliban exacts leverage on those it considered collaborators with the regime, there would be powerful incentives for opponents to prevent its infiltration into other cities. Most Pashtun (Afghanistan's largest ethnic group) are not Taliban and do not support the Taliban. However, virtually all Taliban are Pashtun. Thus, if you are from a Tajik, Hazara or Uzbek ethnic group, the simplest way to protect yourself is to hunker down above the Hindu Kush mountains in the nation's north and push

out all Pashtun. That is a recipe for ethnic cleansing, and massive human suffering throughout the country. Fifth, the result of all this would be an enormous refugee strain on neighboring Pakistan, risking instability in that important country of more than 220 million. Some might believe Pakistan could prop up a Taliban regime in Afghanistan, much as in the 1990s, but that assumption ignores the Taliban's evolution away from Pakistani control, and Pakistan's own difficult experience with militancy over the past 20 years. Today's Pakistan probably does not want an exclusively Taliban-run Islamist emirate on its Western flank.

Sixth and finally — a small silver lining — the new rump Afghanistan in the nation's northeast would likely become a friend of the West, much like Kurdistan in Iraq. It would likely welcome not only financial aid but also Western military and intelligence capabilities. Alas, the scale of the terrorism problem would likely have grown a great deal in the meantime, as the Taliban would be even less likely to break with al-Qaeda than it is today, and most or all of the nation's southeast would be under its control. Along the way, the Afghanistan war's current tragic death tolls, measured in the tens of thousands a year, would surely have multiplied.

By Lyse Doucet & Mahfouz Zubaide

## Will America's 'Moonshot' Peace Plan Work?

US President Joe Biden's team calls it a "moonshot"; critics question if it's a "quick fix"; and millions of Afghans wonder if it's the blueprint to end an endless war, or just make it worse.

An apparent draft of a new peace agreement from the office of the US peace envoy in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, has been leaked after doing the rounds in the Afghan capital, Kabul. The eight tightly typed pages, which were obtained by the BBC along with a leaked three-page letter from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, have kicked up a political storm over the past 48 hours.

In his letter, Mr Blinken wrote that the US did "not intend to dictate terms" to the Afghan government and the Taliban, only enable both sides to "move urgently" towards peace.

But the plain-speaking Afghan Vice-President, Amrullah

Saleh, fired straight back, saying Afghanistan would "never accept a bossy and imposed peace".

"They can make decisions on their troops, not the people of Afghanistan," Mr Saleh said.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, told the BBC they were "still studying" the draft agreement. But he also stressed that they expect the US to meet the terms of the deal they signed last year. In other words, pull out the remaining 10,000 US-led Nato forces by 1 May, or else.

A moonshot is the kind of imagining which soars beyond "blue sky" brainstorming. It's the biggest of ideas to solve the very biggest of problems. In Afghanistan, it's nothing less than life and death: how, after two long decades, to withdraw without precipitating a spiral into greater violence.

"Dignified" is another new buzzword in this dreadful war: a dignified US departure;

a dignified peace for Afghans.

"We do need to explore every avenue for a dignified peace to preserve rights and a fundamental set of values, including a democratic system of governance," said the Afghan government negotiator, Nader Nadery.

Mr Khalilzad, the US envoy, landed in Kabul last week with a new sense of purpose. His presence and draft plan sparked political electricity behind the ugly high walls protecting the elegant drawing rooms of the capital. It is focusing minds in a precarious moment when Afghanistan teeters on a knife edge between war and peace.

"There's an accelerating momentum and a greater sense of urgency," former President Hamid Karzai told the BBC in Kabul last week. There's even more toing and froing than usual in his heavily fortified bastion in the capital; his meeting room, ...

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## Female Cyclists Compete in 35km Race in Kabul



At least 20 women cyclists from four provinces raced in the 35 km "Gawhar Shad Cup" competition in Kabul on Tuesday to mark International Women's Day, riding from the National Olympic Committee HQ, near the Ghazi Stadium, to the Paghman district west of Kabul.

"I am a mother, but I attended this race to honor women's sports," said Nargis Hakimi, a member of the women's national cycling team.

"Women's cycling is a new thing for the people in Afghanistan. We attended this event to normalize it," said Zhala Sarmast, another member of the women's cycling

national team.

The event was held to encourage women's cycling in the country and to increase the numbers of female participants in the cycling federation, officials said, adding that the idea is to train and prepare the cyclists for national and international events.

"We prepare women by holding such events. The women attended the race to explore their abilities and to show to the world that they are capable," said Fazel Ahmad Fazli, head of the federation.

At the end of the event, Yulduz Hashemi won first place, while Fariba and Afsana won second and third place, respectively.



# 54,000 Women Have Invested in Various Sectors in Afghanistan

The Afghan Ministry of Economy says that 54,000 women in the country have made small investments in various sectors till date.

Commemorating the International Women's Day, Economy Minister Karima Hamid Farabi said that 54,000 women are currently involved in small investment, and efforts are underway to expand their businesses.

"Afghan women are specialized at producing Afghan products, but insufficient financial resources limit their business growth," said Minister Farabi.

In addition to security and social problems, lack of access to investment and lack of suitable market for their products are among the problems faced by women investors.



### Lavrov to...

Sputnik V vaccine against the novel coronavirus was undergoing the third stage of trials in the UAE. Now it is among the three vaccines approved for use in the country. With about 65% of its residents already inoculated, the UAE ranks third worldwide in terms of vaccinated population. Besides, UAE is taking part in international clinical trials of the Sputnik Light vaccine, with 3,000 volunteers engaged. Sputnik Light is a one-dose version of Sputnik V, developed by the Gamaleya Institute. The drug consists of only one component, and respectively, it requires only one inoculation instead of two.

### Global and regional security

Diplomats from Moscow and Abu Dhabi will also carry out a detailed exchange of opinions about key aspects on the global and Middle Eastern agenda. "The emphasis will be placed on the need to resolve the existing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa through inclusive dialogue, taking into account legitimate interests and concerns of all parties involved," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. "From this angle, it is planned to consider the situation in Syria, Libya, Yemen and the Arab-Israeli conflict."

The sides will pay special attention to the issue of sustainable stabilization in the Persian Gulf. Approximately 18 months ago, Moscow unveiled its updated Russian Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf region. It envisages a collective mechanism of response to challenges and threats with the participation of regional states, including Iran and all Arab countries.

"We consistently urge to refrain from confrontational rhetoric, to address at the negotiating table all issues that had accumulated and [call upon] all states of the sub-region to engage into building a system of collective security and joint response to existing challenges and threats," the ministry said.

Russia's regional security initiatives received a positive feedback in the United Arab Emirates. Following his visit to Moscow, the UAE top diplomat said his country welcomed Moscow's efforts in this domain.

### Deborah Lyons...

This meeting also aims at accelerating the peace process to end conflict in Afghanistan.

Qatari envoys will also be participating in the meeting as "proud guests", the letter read.

This coincides with the efforts being conducted by Washington to push the Doha negotiations for a quick result.

One slight mistake in these hasty moves can endanger Afghanistan, its gains, and the future of the nation.

### Will America's...

with its traditional oblong arrangement of sofas and chairs, was packed on the day the BBC dropped by.

Cobbling together the "unity and inclusivity" called for in Mr Blinken's letter is Mr Karzai's forte. Warlords of past battles shut out by President Ashraf Ghani are being brought to the top table again, for better or worse. Some, who had reached out to the Taliban to seal their own futures and fortunes, are said to have realised that the cost of disunity could be chaos and collapse.

Mr Ghani, known to prefer an immersion in policy papers to the messy cut and thrust of politicking, is also being pushed back into the fray. In his book-lined office last month in the storied Haram Sarai, the former residence of King Zahir Shah, President Ghani hinted that this was crunch time: "Hard decisions and sacrifices lie ahead," he told us.

But when asked about Mr Khalilzad's previous draft of a power-sharing government, he dismissed it as "somebody sitting behind the desk, dreaming".

So will President Ghani, who still insists he'll only transfer power through elections, accede to this transition plan? One Afghan politician summed it up to us with an Afghan proverb: "If you don't go to school, you'll be taken to school." In other words, Mr Ghani might have no choice. And what about the country's warlords - will they put aside age-old animosities for peace? They may, but with "hearts full of blood" - another proverb, and a warning that old feuds may not lie dormant for long. The draft paper sets out a new arrangement in three parts: guiding principles for

Afghanistan's constitution and the future of the Afghan state; agreed terms to govern the country during a transitional period and a roadmap to a "durable and just settlement"; and finally - and most urgently for Afghans - agreed terms for a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and its implementation".

There are blank spaces and options as well. The length of a transitional government is marked "XX". Two possibilities for an executive administration are offered: one similar to the current arrangement led by a president and vice-presidents; another which includes a prime minister.

In an effort to expedite the process, the US is pulling out all the stops and calling in all the favours. The UN, kept largely on the sidelines until now, is shifting to centre stage to confer greater international legitimacy on the process, and make it easier for neighbours who have long meddled in Afghanistan to sit around the same table. Mr Blinken's letter also proposed a high-level meeting in Turkey to bring warring sides together.

And there is something for everyone in the eight-page draft peace agreement. The Taliban will note a suggestion for a High Council for Islamic Jurisprudence to provide "Islamic guidance and advice" - though it's likely to fall far short of what the Taliban herald as the return of a "pure Islamic government".

Women's groups will see, on the very first page, that "the future constitution will guarantee the protection of women's rights". If anyone knows that words alone are never enough, it's the women and girls whose lives have changed, but remain heavily circumscribed, whether

or not the conservative Taliban are in power.

And millions of Afghans, hearts hollowed out by grief, will press for progress towards what this paper calls "a national policy of transitional justice" - even though they know that the arc of history in Afghanistan has never bent towards justice.

"Bringing lasting peace primarily depends on the Afghan sides, but the international community led by the US was a stakeholder in this conflict, and their responsibility doesn't end with ensuring a safe exit for their troops," said Shaharazad Akbar, chairwoman of the Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission.

"They still have leverage with both Afghan sides of the conflict and can utilise that to push for substantive discussions to end the suffering of Afghans through talks," she said.

There are those who caution against too much hope: "The only attractive argument for this plan is [if] its success means a ceasefire," said Laurel Miller, the director of the Asia Programme at the International Crisis Group and a former US state department official. "But if the weak, fractious, transitional structure collapses - which is a high probability - then the ceasefire won't last."

Peace is on the agenda as never before, but so is war. Both sides talk of plans for the worst of all summer offensives. "It will be a miracle if this works," one Afghan involved in the peace effort told us.

But in a country that has lived through almost everything, aiming for moonshots and miracles may not seem far-fetched. The people are anxious for the endless war to end, and as soon as possible.

### Exchange Rates

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| 92.1  | €   | 92.2 |
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| 20.9  | ₹   | 21   |
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### Rolla Ghani...

limited role of women in economic activities in a ceremony entitled "Women's Empowerment Roadmap" on occasion of International Women's Day.

"When women play an active role, they can contribute to the country's economic growth, politics and progress. Unfortunately, when the economic activity of a country

is measured, the economic role of women is ignored. There must be a basis for small and large business for women," she said. "It will increase the political and economic stability of the country."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has launched the "Women's Empowerment Roadmap" program for this purpose.

The Acting Minister of Women's Affairs Hosseineh Safi said the program aims to empower and grow women economically.

"The goal of the program is for institutions working in the economic sector to launch a national roadmap for women's empowerment. This program is a vision and a goal. We want to work to empower women in the city, the countryside and at home," Ms. Safi added.



# Biden Sued by 12 States after Climate Change Order

A group of 12 states in the US on Monday filed a lawsuit against President Joe Biden's climate change executive order, claiming it would damage the American economy and the states' energy industries.

The group argued that the president and his administration do not have the authority to assert and expand their federal regulatory power to US states.

They also claimed that Biden's climate change regulations would have a significant economic impact on the world's largest oil and natural gas producer.

State attorneys general from Missouri, Arkansas, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah are involved in the lawsuit filed by Missouri Attorney General

Eric Schmitt.

"Manufacturing, agriculture, and energy production are essential to Missouri's economy and employ thousands of hard-working Missourians across the state," Schmitt said in a statement.

The suit stressed if Biden's order stands, it will cause trillions of dollars of damage to the US economy for decades by destroying jobs, restraining energy production, and preventing America's energy independence.

Biden's order, titled "Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis," revoked permit for Keystone oil pipeline extension, temporarily prohibited drilling in the Arctic, and ordered federal agencies to comply with the administration's environmental policies.



## A look at the world

### Turkey, Uzbekistan Talk Potential to up Economic Ties

Turkey and Uzbekistan on Tuesday have signed a memorandum of understanding to improve bilateral relations and cooperation. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, in a joint press conference at Uzbek capital Tashkent, announced the signing of a memorandum and said, "We have great potential to improve our economic relations, and we will make that happen." Cavusoglu said the memorandum "will further develop the relations between both our ministries and our countries; and in the upcoming period, to increase trade, we intend to sign a preferential trade agreement and a free trade agreement."

As he hailed the bilateral relations between



the two countries, the Turkish foreign minister noted that his country is among the top five trade partner countries of Uzbekistan and the country that invests in Uzbekistan the most.

Separately, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov said the delegations discussed how to improve bilateral cooperation, international and regional issues, and improve relations with international organizations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Turkic Council.

Prior to the joint press conference, Cavusoglu and Kamilov had a meeting where the countries' delegations exchanged views regarding the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council's agenda.

The Joint Strategic Planning Group meeting will take place today at Tashkent.

"As we start the preparations for the second meeting of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council, we will also follow the implementation of the decisions taken and the agreements we signed at the first summit," Cavusoglu said.

"We will also discuss the Turkic Council, Afghanistan and other regional issues," he added.

Regarding the high-level strategic cooperation between Turkey and ... **P2**

### Australia seeks pressure on EU over vaccine supply



Australia plans to build a "coalition of countries" to pressure the EU into delivering planned doses of coronavirus vaccines, local media reported.

Last Thursday, Italy decided to stop the shipment of more than 250,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses destined for Australia.

The European Commission defended Italy's move, saying it was not targeting Australia but ensuring that AstraZeneca delivers the number of doses agreed with EU authorities. Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan said he is "incredibly disappointed" by the decision, adding he plans to work with Canada, Japan, Norway and New Zealand to push the EU to change its mind.

"Hopefully they will change their mind. The more we can put collective pressure on them, the more they will realize what they are doing is wrong," the country's public broadcaster ABC news quoted Tehan as saying.

In a bid to force companies to meet their contract obligations, the EU announced in early January an export control mechanism that can halt deliveries of COVID-19 vaccines outside the bloc if the producers' commitments are not met.

AstraZeneca almost halved its supplies to the EU in the first quarter of the year, and later said it would reduce deliveries by another 50% in the second quarter.

Struggling to move forward with their massive vaccination campaigns, many European countries are now facing scarcity of vaccine supplies, splitting over the possible solutions.

Some of them are trying to find extra supplies of vaccines outside the joint agreement set up by the EU, whose negotiating ability has been widely criticized.

Australia has so far secured 53.8 million doses of AstraZeneca, of which 50 million will be made locally, according to ABC.

The country has so far reported 29,061 cases with 909 deaths, according to the US's Johns Hopkins University. **P3**

### Lavrov to Begin His Middle East Tour with a Working Visit to UAE

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will begin his Middle East tour by paying a working visit to the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. His journey also involves visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The schedule of the Russian top diplomat's visit to Abu Dhabi includes meetings with Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Russia maintains close ties with Persian Gulf countries. This winter, Moscow was visited by foreign policy chiefs of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.



#### New cooperation perspectives

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, Lavrov's meetings in the UAE are to become an important part of bilateral political dialogue, during which Russian President Vladimir Putin maintains "regular trust-based contacts" with leaders of Arab monarchies.

Among other things, the sides will discuss ways to further increase business cooperation in line with agreements previously reached at the top level. Despite obstacles created by the novel coronavirus pandemic, Russia-UAE trade increased by 78% in the past year, reaching all-time high of \$3.27 billion. The Russian side also confirmed previously announced plans to hold later this year a regular plenary session of a bilateral intergovernmental commission on trade, economic and technical cooperation. The commission's previous meeting took place in October 2019.

The sides will also discuss new projects in a wide range of economic sectors, such as power generation, industry, agriculture, infrastructure and peaceful use of space. Special emphasis will be placed on cultural and humanitarian ties as well.

#### Use of Russian vaccines

Enhancing cooperation in tackling the novel coronavirus pandemic is expected to be among the main issues raised at the talks. When the Russian and UAE top diplomats last met in December 2020, Russia's ... **P3**



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