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Heart of Asia

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10 afs



11 Members of Afghan Forces Killed in Helmand

At least 11 members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces were killed in two separate incidents in the southern province of Helmand on Sunday night, sources from security agencies said on Monday.

Two of the forces were killed in a car bomb attack in Nawa district in Helmand, sources said.

Meanwhile, militants attacked a security forces outpost in Helmand-Kandahar highway on Sunday night in which nine members of Afghan forces were killed and four more were wounded, sources said.

Security officials have not commented on the two incidents.

The attacks come amidst a sharp rise in violence in various parts of the country.

One security force member ...

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Afghanistan Borrows More Than 17b Afs This Fiscal Year

The Afghan government has borrowed 17.4 billion afghanis from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the ongoing fiscal year.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News report, Afghanistan has received \$1.8 billion in loans from World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Saudi Fund, Asian Development Bank (ADB), IMF, Bulgaria, Italy, Kuwait Fund and OPEC Fund over the past 17 years.

During the period, the country repaid only \$300 million.

According to Finance Ministry sources, Afghanistan currently owes the International Community \$1.5 billion.

Budget deficit led to fresh borrowing: Mohammad Rafi Taab, a spokesman for the Ministry of Finance (MoF), acknowledged to Pajhwok that the Afghan government had taken loan this year due to a budget deficit.

He added: "The MoF had projected a budget deficit of 17.4 billion afghanis in 1400 solar year, and the ministry has borrowed it from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)." ...

P3

Narcotics Still Primary Source of Taliban Income: SIGAR



A US watchdog in a report released last month says that 40 to 60 percent of the Taliban's revenue comes from narcotics.

The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in its report cites a meeting with Resolute Support officials in February 2018, saying that "a

senior official from the Resolute Support Counter Threat Finance Cell estimated that between 40 to 60 percent of the Taliban's revenue comes from narcotics trafficking." SIGAR also quoted a UN report as saying that Afghan officials estimate Taliban income from narcotics between June 2018 and June 2019

to be approximately \$400 million. According to SIGAR, the UN report also notes that the Taliban now controls all aspects of narcotics production, which likely indicates that their total revenues are even higher. SIGAR quotes a UN Security Council report from June 2019 as saying

that the Taliban continue to adapt and expand their ability to maintain and generate financial revenues to support their operations.

The primary sources of income for the Taliban remain narcotics, illicit mineral and other resource extraction, taxation, extortion, the sale of commercial and government services and property, and donations from abroad, SIGAR says. The Taliban rejected their involvement in the drugs and narcotics trade, but Afghan officials said the group has been involved in the illicit business.

The watchdog says that Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium and the source of more than 90 percent of the world's heroin. Since 2001, the United States has allocated more than \$8 billion to fight opium production and trafficking in Afghanistan, the report says.

Quoting US Department of Defense officials, the report says that a small portion of the overall US counter-narcotics funding has gone to counter threat finance (CTF) efforts directed at the Afghan terrorist narcotics trade.

Bangladesh Extends Helping Hand to Afghanistan for peace, progress

Kabul: Stressing that peace is necessary for progress and development, Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh Prime Minister, on Monday offered help to Afghanistan in their efforts for development.

Her remarks came when she met outgoing Afghan ambassador Abdul Qayoom Malikzad at her official residence Ganobhaban and added that peace is a must for development.

PM's press secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting. She said that non-government organizations like BRAC were working for the socio-economic development of Afghanistan.

The Bangladesh PM that said the government has involved the public so that their support can help establish peace.



Iran, Uzbek FMs Meet, Discuss Afghan Peace Process

Kabul: Iranian and Uzbek foreign ministers met on Monday to discuss bilateral ties and cooperation between the two countries on the Afghan peace process.

This is Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's first tour in the solar year 1,400 (which began on March 21) wherein he met his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov in Tashkent for regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Cooperation on peace in Afghanistan and bilateral relations in the field of transportation, transit and energy, culture and tourism were discussed.

Emphasizing the regional position and international



influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kamilov stressed on the expansion cooperation of the two countries in various fields, including cooperation in legal and international forums, parliamentary cooperation between the friendship

groups of the parliaments of the two countries, and use of Iran's port capacities along the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

Iranian foreign minister is also scheduled to meet Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on Monday afternoon.

China FM...

and abide by market rules, and refrain from setting obstacles, abusing power, and depriving others of their legitimate right to development, Wang said, adding that if there is still confrontation, China will deal with it calmly and face it fearlessly.

“We resolutely resist gross interference in China’s internal affairs, and more resolutely oppose unlawful unilateral sanctions imposed on the basis of lies and false information,” Wang said.

He said China will not compromise or retreat, as it sticks to the basic norms of international relations and stands for the interests of many developing, small and medium-sized countries. China definitely has the right to fight back since it must defend national sovereignty and national dignity.

“Dialogue is better than confrontation, and cooperation is better than confrontation,” Wang said, urging the U.S. to actively respond to the expectations of regional countries and the international community, work with China to show what a major power should be like, and jointly maintain regional and world peace, stability and development.

11 Members of...

was killed in an explosion in Qarabagh district north of the city of Kabul on Monday morning. Two explosions happened in Paghman district in Kabul on Sunday, leaving four security force members dead. The Taliban claimed responsibility for one of the incidents in Paghman that included a car bomb attack and shooting.

By HAFED AL-GHWELL

Biden Aims for the Impossible in Afghanistan

A cursory examination of the emerging US policy on Afghanistan would probably conclude that the strategy to end a two decade-old, mostly fruitless, military intervention is ill-conceived and mistimed. That view has substantial support even among the ranks of Washington’s dovish cohort, which is not keen on striking a deal with the Taliban given its track record as a fundamentalist, autocratic Islamist movement with no inclinations toward democracy, human rights or personal liberty — along with its support for Al-Qaeda and ties to 9/11.

However, the overall aim of the Biden plan is to attempt the unprecedented, ending the US-led coalition’s Afghanistan mission by trying to establish a democratic, stable and self-sustaining long-term settlement. Its current iteration involves reviving a stalled peace process using a multilateral approach via forceful regional diplomacy, as well as pressuring the Kabul government led by President Ashraf Ghani to support the process and the Taliban to de-escalate its attacks.

Attempts at establishing a centralized, democratic-leaning government have failed just as much as the Taliban’s unfettered illiberalism. By making a play for a decentralized government, the White House is investing diplomatic and political capital in a shaky power-sharing arrangement between two entities that deny each other’s legitimacy.

An abrupt departure risks new instability and conflict, endangering the strategic or security interests of neighboring states such as Pakistan, India and even China. Afghanistan’s proximity to the Uighur Muslims of Xinjiang, for example, makes for an exceedingly wary Beijing, concerned that Taliban supremacy will give aid or comfort to the separatist ideals of Uighur militants

Meanwhile, Pakistan’s alleged ties to the Taliban have continuously benefited the latter in the form of havens in the former’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas, financial and material support, and training camps — the perfect mix of conditions to sustain a long-term insurgency movement. In fact, the Quetta Shura, the military arm that works closely with the Taliban’s leadership council, was for a time located in Pakistan’s Balochistan province.

Pakistan is now rumored to be urging what remains of the Quetta Shura to relocate to Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, as the Taliban consolidates and



reorganizes itself ahead of intra-Afghan talks reignited by the White House peace initiative and the UN-led peace process to come out of it. Whether the peace process succeeds or not, Islamabad will not risk losing its leverage with a stronger Taliban, especially when it became embedded in the proposed power-sharing government, since it will be a highly effective proxy for Pakistan to continue exerting undue influence in Afghan affairs.

The conflict of interests among regional players — and there are many — is not the only worry for what the White House plans to achieve in the run-up to the May deadline for coalition troops to withdraw from Afghanistan. Even in Washington, the administration appears divided between political appointees, wary of the American public’s exhaustion with “forever wars” ahead of 2022 legislative elections, and careerists in the military, intelligence and national security who fear the inevitable consequences of a premature departure. However, going from the current stand-off and, for now, stalled talks between the Ghani government and the Taliban to a complete withdrawal of the US-led coalition after a successful handover will be impossible to achieve before May 1.

It is not just the logistics of withdrawal that will result in a missed deadline, there is a laundry list of determinations to be made, ranging from state security to divvying up legislative, budgetary and political power. After all, once negotiations are complete and signatories put pen to paper, the final terms will have to ensure the Taliban is not simply handed power, as in

the original 50-50 power-sharing deal, but is forced to compete for it politically at local, regional and national levels. However, this will have to come after the White House addresses numerous concerns raised after details of its proposed peace initiative were leaked — probably a deliberate move to gauge stakeholder attitudes ahead of the intra-Afghan meeting in Turkey this month.

For instance, while the NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels last month focused on revitalizing the alliance and establishing a “unity of purpose” against Russia on the Eurasian continent and China in the Indo-Pacific region, European members are still not sold on the Biden plan. Additionally, the EU worries that if the May 1 deadline is not met, Washington has still not indicated fully what the conditions for a future withdrawal will look like.

However, America’s transatlantic partners all agree the White House’s Afghanistan proposals provide much-needed momentum in a stalled process despite progress from a fairly well-established Doha process and planned talks in Istanbul offer a venue for coalition partners to collaborate and sync postures, increasing pressure on detractors to accede.

For now, the White House must concentrate its efforts on ensuring the Istanbul talks succeed, unlike the parallel meeting held in Moscow in March, without risking the Doha process or recreating the largely failed 2001 Bonn Agreement. With better planning and clear communication on the agenda and attendees, Washington can avoid a catastrophic setback ... **P3**

By JOHN CLAMP

Whose Peace in Afghanistan?

At this moment, with developments quickening as the May 1 deadline for the departure of U.S. forces rapidly approaches, we’re getting a lesson in realist-style geopolitical arm-twisting. The thing about Afghanistan is that it’s raw, metallic power on the ground that counts. No fancy ideals or dirigiste policies can substitute.

Afghans feel as if they have been interrupted, a long time ago, by shrapnel and high explosives, fired indiscriminately at them by invading armies. They want to get back to a dimly remembered ‘normal’. They’re sick of the rampant corruption. Women want education. Health outcomes are catastrophically appalling. All our contacts speak of a desire to calibrate their lives, many of which are in some respects ossified in tradition, according to their own imperatives, which are widely various around a country that nonetheless abhors federalism and has the potential, barring interference, to be cooperative.

So, in Dushanbe this week, and as the pace builds to possibly crucial talks in Turkey in April, we’re

witnessing a lot of jockeying for air time on U.S. and European networks by Afghan power-brokers. Here’s Ahmad Massoud, son of the revered ‘Lion of Panshir’ Ahmad Shah Massoud, telling France 24 that the people he represents would balk at a deal that gave too much ground to the Taliban, while over on Al Jazeera Hazara leaders, who as a minority cultural grouping often get a raw deal from Kabul, talk of strengthening their militia units to protect their villages from renewed Taliban attacks.

Despite all the lungfuls of platitudes about a ‘lasting peace’, talks are stalled, and the rhetoric in the Heart of Asia talks in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (under way right now) reflects pretty hardened positions. India’s external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar advocated a peace acceptable to countries outside Afghanistan, by which he meant his own, of course. U.S. president Joe Biden has also sidestepped questions about the deadline, saying that a decision is pending. Biden’s Secretary of State Tony Blinken has also notably

shied away from committing to the date. They’re being told to worry about their cratering worldwide influence.

Russia, which very publicly hosted talks between Ashraf Ghani’s government and the Taliban in Moscow a couple of weeks back, senses an opportunity to gain some traction in Central Asia, even though the United States’ Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad was also in attendance. Wan rays of hope flickered in Moscow’s winter for a while, but the reality on the ground keeps on intruding, annoyingly for all concerned.

The unpalatable fact is that the Taliban, who control huge swathes of Afghanistan outside Kabul, can keep turning up the pressure on all the other parties to the talks, at will. Seasoned observers say that the real players with the real power here are the U.S.A., and the Taliban. Hamid Karzai and others speak of their distaste of foreign influence in their country. But Pakistan, and its intelligence service the ISI, have very close ties to the Taliban and they’ve been doing what they’re doing for a very long time.

Reconciliation Council Reviewing Over 25 Peace Proposals

Senior political leaders and government officials are reviewing over 25 peace proposals, including that of the Presidential Palace, to make a unified peace road map for the upcoming conference in Turkey.

The committee that operates under the High Council for National Reconciliation is led by former vice president Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, and its members are politicians and senior government officials, including the national security adviser.

The peace proposals have been sent by political parties to the council. The 15-member committee is also reviewing views from 30 members of the council on the peace proposals.

Analysts said the key is to find in these proposals common ground to move the peace process forward.

Sources within the Presidential Palace said that President Ghani is expected to share publically his peace proposal that calls for a three-phase plan to end the war and achieve peace in the country.

Ghani’s proposal, which has been shared with foreign diplomats in Kabul, has three phases: (1) making peace or holding talks with the Taliban, (2)



building peace – with language that hints at a transitional government, and (3) sustaining peace, which indirectly refers to a post-transitional government situation, according to sources.

“Different views and proposals were discussed in the (committee) meeting. We will make efforts to make a unified proposal for the Turkey conference,” the reconciliation council spokesman Fraidoon Khwazon said. “We are also working on unifying the views.”

The Jamiat-e-Islami party said there is a need for unifying the views on peace proposals that have been sent to the reconciliation council. ... **P3**

Wolesi Jirga Warn of Serious Development Budget Embezzlement

Members of the Wolesi Jirga warned on Monday that millions of dollars earmarked for development projects in Afghanistan could be embezzled and sent out of the country by officials after the ministry of finance ordered that all development projects be put on hold. The minister said however that it has called for projects to be prioritized as its dealing with a budget deficit. "The Finance Ministry has told all other ministries that no projects can be implemented without the approval of the (finance) ministry," said MP Makhdom Abdullah Mohammadi. He also said the signature of the Acting Finance Minister carries no weight. Parliament approved the budget for the new fiscal year, 1400, in February following tension between government and the Wolesi Jirga

over the document. The estimated budget for the current year is over 473 billion AFN (nearly \$6 billion), including 311 billion AFN (\$4 billion) for the regular budget and 162 billion AFN (\$2 billion) for the development budget. Some MPs said money is already being embezzled. "A clear looting [of government revenue] is underway; the budget is being looted before the eyes of millions of people," MP Ghulam Husain Naseri said. Another MP, Allah Gul Mujahed, meanwhile, stated: "We passed the year 1400 budget but projects for the year 1399 (2020) have been postponed to the year 1400 and the Acting Minister of Finance has told the Ministry of Public Works to stop working on development projects. They may want to transfer money



[outside Afghanistan]."

The Ministry of Finance, however, stated that the organization has faced a budget deficit.

"We have faced a deficit in the budget; therefore, an official letter

has been issued [to the ministries] to create a financial discipline and prioritize national projects and effectively use the national budget," said Rafi Tabe head of Finance Ministry's media office.

Biden Aims for...

in its grand ambitions, which may prove challenging to recover from given the already tight window to lay the foundations for its proposed initiatives.

Fortunately, the Afghan public has mostly welcomed the Biden initiative, if only to spark more dialogue on key issues, such as whether decisions by the Islamic Council will supersede those of the judiciary. Overall, the positive sentiments also stem from the fact that the Biden White House has not shied from a central role in securing a permanent settlement in Afghanistan, as opposed to the previous administration's "settlement at any cost" strategy. Unfortunately, a palpable sense of insecurity remains despite a decrease in targeted violence against civilians. And, while it is increasingly likely no coalition troops will exit by May 1, Afghans feel excluded from intensifying diplomatic efforts, while political elites continue to reject compromises. Kabul has also communicated its displeasure with the Biden plan, which could complicate the adoption of multilaterally negotiated terms by both the government and the Taliban. Already, the government is refusing to release more Taliban prisoners — claiming former detainees are returning to the battlefield, while the Taliban may escalate attacks to force the coalition's exit and scuttle the US peace initiative.

For now, the ball remains in the Biden administration's court. Feedback from the leaked proposals will probably factor into the planning of the Istanbul meeting and crafting more palatable terms to transform a draft proposal into a formal strategy to corral stakeholders and elicit their cooperation toward the formation of what appears to be a consociational democracy in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, there is no easy formula to comprehensively transform Afghanistan when armed interventions are tantamount to political suicide, while a premature departure will only endanger the Afghani, threaten regional stability and risk new conflicts. Fortunately, the Afghan public, the region and international community support a stable, peaceful Afghanistan. The trouble, however, lies with the Kabul political elite not keen on sharing power with an equally uncompromising Taliban leadership, and it can only be hoped the flurry of diplomatic activity and intensifying pressure will achieve the impossible as envisioned by the Biden peace initiative.

Afghanistan...

Without elaborating, he said the money had been borrowed from international foundations to meet the government expenses.

He did not provide details about the interest on the loan, but said Afghanistan was obliged to repay the loan by June 2026. The Afghan government has borrowed a total of 1.5 billion dollars from the international countries and foundations and it was easy to repay these loans, because most of them had no interest, he explained.

Economic analysts:

Economists say borrowing from international organizations for implementation of projects is not a concern but there should be transparency in all affairs. They say budget deficits are worrisome and unnecessary spending should be avoided to prevent the budget deficit in the current and future fiscal years. Saifuddin Saihoon, who teaches economics at Kabul University, told Pajhwok that borrowing money for projects implementation was not a problem as many countries did so to implement their programs.

He said: "Probably countries that are unable to repay their loans are more likely being forgiven to repay."

He described the budget deficit

as "worrying", saying that huge concession, the purchase of expensive furniture, color for palaces, the cost of useless projects, travels and unnecessary meetings were the reasons behind the budget deficit.

Saihoon said his government should be able to maintain its financial resources from tax collection, sale of interest-bearing documents, sale of assets and more.

According to him, another way to solve the budget deficit is to borrow from the central bank, even from people, but in case it is not possible to borrow local banks, the government can borrow from the World Bank, the international community and friendly countries.

Stressing proportionality of the government's treasury and expenditure, Saihoon said the government should manage its financial resource properly and regulate its expenditures based on its revenues, as well as monitor revenue and prevent theft.

At the same time, Qais Mohammadi, a lecturer at a private university in Kabul and a political analyst, said borrowing from reputable countries and foundations was not a problem. He asked the MoF to set up a comprehensive and systematic mechanism for the government

to repay the loans and create programs to repay it on time.

The economist said it was more appropriate to obtain loans domestically than internationally, adding that getting domestic loans would help domestic banks through interest rates.

He said the budget deficit was not a new issue, it happened in the past as well.

"Afghanistan's development budget is controlled by donor countries and the budget deficit will be addressed through international aid," he explained. He criticized the existence of corruption in various areas of revenue collection, saying that corruption, purchase of expensive cars, unprecedented fuel costs and other unnecessary expenses caused the budget deficit.

Mohammadi said the revenue of municipalities, customs and other sources of revenue in the country was being embezzled due to corruption, which must be curbed.

The systematic corruption has taken root in the government; he said, adding there was no other way to solve the problem except serious legal actions.

According to him, in order to reduce the budget deficit, addition expenses need to be reduced and economic activities should be boosted.

Reconciliation...

"A real consensus has not been formed internally. However, a technical team is working," said Ata Mohammad Noor, head of a splinter faction of the Jamiat-e-Islami party. "To unify views, so far 35 members of the leadership committee of the High Council for National Reconciliation have shared their ideas. I hope that a unified view is achieved."

"The proposal of the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan is ready to be shared with the people of Afghanistan and the reconciliation council," said Ehsan Nairo, spokesman for the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan.

"The peace committee of the Wolesi Jirga in a meeting yesterday (Sunday) decided to gather views of lawmakers and write it as a text and will send it to the government and the reconciliation council," parliament speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani said.

Sources said that based on Ghani's proposal, the president and his deputies' positions should be preserved along with government forces until an election is held.

"The proposals that have been made in Kabul--none of them emphatically called for a transitional or interim or another type of setup. The best proposal is the US-proposed peace plan that should be

implemented," said Sayed Ishaq Gailani, head of the National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan.

"Decisions have been made. The fact that they will decide on Afghanistan on April 16 is because the Taliban is putting pressure on Americans that if they remain--how long will they remain? --and this matter should be made clear," said Tawfiq Tamas, an international affairs analyst.

The Turkey conference is expected to be held this month. Sources familiar with the matter have said that two dates -- April 12 and 16 -- are under discussion by involved parties for the meeting that some have said will continue for 10 days.

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China FM Urges U.S. To Respect China's Core Interests

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday urged the United States to truly respect China's core interests. Wang made the remarks in response to media query about China-U.S. relations after meetings with his counterparts from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea in China's Fujian Province. Citing that the foreign ministers have regarded China's development and growth as a historical necessity, Wang said it is believed that China's development conforms to the common expectations and long-term interests of all countries in the region, which should not be blocked. He said the foreign ministers believed that facing the challenges of globalization and the post-epidemic era, China and the U.S. should have more dialogue and cooperation in this region, instead of confrontation, and fulfill their

obligations as major powers. "China is willing to respond to the expectations of all parties and continue to make its own efforts to this end," Wang said. Regarding the arguments of competition, cooperation and confrontation repeatedly put forward by the U.S. on its relations with China, Wang said China's position is consistent and clear. China welcomes dialogue on the basis of equality and mutual respect, Wang said, adding that China does not approve of one-upmanship in the world, and does not accept that one country has the final say in world affairs. "China welcomes cooperation if there is the need, but cooperation needs to take into account each other's concerns and mutual benefit. It cannot go in the fashion of one side unilaterally raising conditions and making lists," Wang said. China will not evade competition if it is needed, but competition should be fair and just ... **P2**



A look at the world

Iran Arrests 'Israeli Spy', Others in Touch with Foreign Intelligence: Iranian Media

Iran has arrested an "Israeli spy" and a number of other people who were in contact with foreign intelligence services, Iranian state media reported on Monday, without giving the nationality of those



arrested. "An Israeli spy has been arrested in Iran's East Azerbaijan province ... also other spies who were in contact with several countries' intelligence services have been arrested as well," it quoted an Intelligence Ministry official as saying. Israeli officials did not immediately comment on the report. The Islamic Republic does not recognize Israel and has accused it of being behind acts of sabotage and assassinations of nuclear scientists. An Iranian convicted of spying for U.S. and Israeli intelligence was executed in 2020. Iran has blamed Israel for last year's killing of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, who was seen by Western intelligence services as the mastermind of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons programme. Tehran has denied seeking to build a nuclear arsenal. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied responsibility for the killing.

Putin to Address Federal Assembly with annual Message on April 21



Russian President Vladimir Putin will address the Federal Assembly with the annual message on April 21, presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the media. "The president will address the Federal Assembly with the annual message on April 21," he said. Peskov added that the venue of the event would be announced later. Different options are being considered, he said. "Let us not anticipate events. I believe that in the near future we will open accreditation for the mass media and at the same time announce the place where it will be held," Peskov said. He preferred to keep quiet about the themes of the forthcoming address. "Traditionally we never disclose the content or any of the themes that will be touched upon in the message. We will not do this now, too," he said. "As far as the indexing of pensions for employed pensioners is concerned, the government has been working actively on this issue. It is true that the Cabinet of Ministers has sent different proposals on this score to the president," Peskov said when asked if the issue of pensions would be touched upon in the presidential message. He added that "no decisions have been made (on indexing pensions for working pensioners)."

European Council Chief Visits Libya, Expresses Support

European Council President Charles Michel voiced support for Libya on Sunday as the North African country hopes to end years of civil war. "The Libyan people have witnessed a historic moment with the installation of the new Presidential Council and the appointment by the House of Representatives of the Government of National Unity," said Michel after his meeting in the capital Tripoli with Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh.



"I wanted to come as soon as possible to convey to the Libyan people and their new leadership a clear and strong message," he added. "We commend your efforts to come together in a spirit of national unity and reconciliation," he said. "The future of Libya is in your hands. You have a unique opportunity to build a united, sovereign, stable and prosperous country." Noting that the EU stands by the Libyan people, Michel also announced that the bloc's ambassador will return on a permanent basis to Tripoli by the end of April. On Feb. 5, Libyan delegates elected Mohammad Menfi to head a three-member Presidential Council and Dbeibeh the new prime minister. Elections in the country are set for December. On Monday, Michel is expected to meet with Tunisian President Kais Saied and on Tuesday with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.



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