



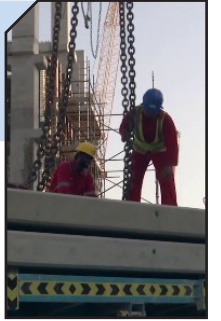
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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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Iran Concerned About Developments in Afghanistan

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Monday said Tehran is following the recent developments in Afghanistan closely as it is a "worry" for them.

Addressing a virtual press conference Saeed Khatibzadeh said:

"We are following the developments in Afghanistan closely."

He said Tehran is consulting with regional activists on the developments and foreign troops withdrawal. "Developments in Afghanistan have worried us," he said.

"For the sake of peace, stability and security in Afghanistan, we will do our best to make the future of this country stable."

Referring to Iran's close ties with the Afghan government and Afghan groups, Khatibzadeh said: "We are also in contact with the Afghan ... **P3**



Calls Grow to Ensure Protection of Journalists in Afghanistan On World Press Freedom Day

As the world marks, World Press Freedom Day on May 3, the global community at large has come forward to opine that the Afghan authorities must take urgent steps to provide journalists with greater protection, following a year of spiraling threats, intimidation, harassment, and violent attacks against the country's media workers.

Afghanistan is ranked 122nd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2021 World Press Freedom Index. "At least 11 journalists were killed in 2020 in targeted attacks in Afghanistan, with four more reportedly killed this year. Nearly all the killings, invariably carried out by unidentified gunmen, have gone uninvestigated. Faced with this dire situation and with multiple journalist 'hit lists' in open circulation, many journalists are fleeing the country," said Amnesty ... **P3**

U.S. Prepared for Every Scenario in Afghanistan: Blinken



Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Sunday that the US is prepared for every scenario in Afghanistan.

Speaking to CBS News he said

when asked if the US was prepared for the worst-case scenario in Afghanistan – the failure of the US-backed government and take over by Taliban – Blinken said: "We have

to be prepared for every scenario, and there are a range of them.

"And we're looking at this – in a very clear-eyed way. But we've been engaged in Afghanistan

for 20 years, and we sometimes forget why we went there in the first place, and that was to deal with the people who attacked us on 9/11. And we did," Blinken responded.

Blinken also said that bringing American troops home does not mean giving up on Afghanistan as Washington will continue to support Afghanistan.

"Just because our troops are coming home doesn't mean we're leaving. We're not. Our embassy's staying, the support that we're giving to Afghanistan when it comes to – economic support, development, humanitarian, that remains. And not only from us, from partners and allies," he added.

This comes as the US-led NATO forces on Saturday, May 1, officially began withdrawing from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, when Blinken was asked about the closure of Guantanamo Bay, he said: "We believe that it should be, that's certainly a goal, but it's something that we'll bring some focus to in the months ahead."

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37% Increase in Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan: Survey

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has increased by 37 percent to 224 hectares of land in the solar year 1399 (2020) as compared to the solar 1398 (2019), as per a survey of poppy cultivation and production by the National Statistic and Information Authority (NSIA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

According to their joint statement, poppy production this year has been announced at 6,300 tons, which shows that poppy ... **P2**



Taliban, US in Talks Over Full Withdrawal by July: Sources

Americans and the Taliban are discussing the possibility of ending the withdrawal process by the beginning of July, sources familiar with the matter said.

The Taliban will return to the talks, will attend the Turkey conference and will reduce violence if there is an agreement on the matter, the sources said.

The US began its withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan this week, and, based on President Joe Biden's decision, the process was to be completed by Sept. 11.

According to the Doha agreement, the US was expected to complete the withdrawal by May 1.

The Taliban considers the postponement of the withdrawal date a violation of the Doha agreement.

"The US has set a deadline for itself and it is possible that the Taliban will not agree to it and then a deadline in



the middle will be agreed upon," said former Taliban commander Sayed Akbar Agha.

US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Kabul on Monday and, according to sources, he intends to discuss his regional trip and the upcoming Istanbul conference with Afghan officials, along with other topics related to the peace process.

Khalilzad met with Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum in Uzbekistan this week. He also met with Uzbekistan Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov and discussed the Afghan peace process.

"Discussions were held on the peace process and the Istanbul conference as well as political consensus," Dostum's spokesman ... **P3**

UK Hosts First...

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will meet U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken later Monday. The two are expected to discuss the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, a post-Brexit trade deal and Iran's nuclear program, among other issues, according to Sky News.

Britain holds the rotating presidency of the G7 group, which also includes the United States, France, Germany, Canada, Japan and Italy.

The meeting this week will also be attended by representatives from the European Union, India, as well as Australia, Japan, South Korea and South Africa. The G7 summit will be held in Cornwall, a seaside resort in southwestern England, on June 11-13.

During their virtual meeting in February, the G7 leaders pledged to cooperate with the Group of 20 (G20) and other international institutions on a range of global issues including fighting the pandemic and climate change, among others.

The leaders had reaffirmed that these will be priorities at the upcoming G7 Summit in Britain in June.

37% Increase...

cultivation has increased in most parts of the country. NSIA says that the survey was conducted using remote sensing technology and the most modern statistical models, the results of which are highly accurate.

By Masud Ahmad Khan

End of The Longest War

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 26, 1979, reshaped the future of Central Asia and South Asia. The invasion plunged Afghanistan into a bloody civil war which is continuing to-date. After the Soviet withdrawal, there was a civil war for the control of Kabul amongst various Mujahedeen factions. During the infighting, the Taliban suddenly appeared in Kandahar and their rise was so swift that they were able to manage Afghanistan's political affairs in the matters of Shariah.

Pakistan, Saudi Arab and the UAE recognised the Taliban government after it took power in 1996. It was on October 7, 2001, when the US started bombing Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. The US blamed Al-Qaida for being behind the attack. The Taliban government sheltered Osama who master minded the strikes. The Musharraf government agreed to side with the US and allowed it to use Pakistan's air space and bases. Karzai was appointed to lead an interim government and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was deployed. In the 2014 election, Karzai became the first president.

The Taliban regrouped in the South and East of Afghanistan and launched an insurgency. The strength of the US troops rose to around one lac by 2010. Osama was killed on May 2, 2011, in a US Special Forces operation in Abbottabad. In 2014 Ashraf Ghani was elected as president of Afghanistan but the Taliban continued their attacks on coalition forces and Afghan government forces.

Today, the Afghan Taliban controls major parts of Afghanistan and the government is too weak to face them. In mid-2018, Americans and Taliban representatives started discreet talks in Qatar for the future of Afghanistan. On February 29, 2020, the Trump administration and the Taliban signed a historic deal in Doha according to which the US was to pull out its troops by May 1, 2021. The Biden administration is not meeting the May 1 dead line set as according to it, the withdrawal will be completed by September 2021 so that it coincides with 9/11.

According to the Washington Post, more than 2000 US servicemen were killed and more than one lac Afghan civilians have been killed or injured. Ahead of the formal announcement of the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to COAS General Bajwa. General Bajwa has welcomed the announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan.



Now, let us have a look at the Indian interest and involvement in Afghanistan. After independence, Nehru's government backed Afghan claims and projected so called Pashtunistan as well as the Durand Line issue. During the cold war, India and Afghanistan supported the Soviet Union and Pakistan was taken as a common enemy. During the civil war, India supported the Northern Alliance against Taliban. Later, India supported the government of Karzai and Ashraf Ghani against Pakistan.

India's obsession with Afghanistan is primarily for its use as a potential pressure point against Pakistan. India's entire Afghan policy is determined by its desire to confront Pakistan with the prospect of a two front war. India wants to establish a close rapport with anti-Pakistan groups to pressurise Pakistan. India is also trying to keep Afghanistan away from joining any organisation with Pakistan, Turkey, Iran and the Central Asian States. The main objective of India is political instability and chaos in Afghanistan which suits the Indian interest.

India has already started a misinformation campaign according to which Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad will use Afghan territory against India. India is afraid of losing its control in Afghanistan. Recently, the Indian Chief of Defence has shown his

concern that the withdrawal will create a vacuum which will enable Pakistan to gain an advantage because of its close ties with Afghan Taliban.

The implications of withdrawal for Pakistan are far-reaching. First of all, Pakistan has to request the Afghan Taliban to agree with the new proposal and deadline and to refrain from targeting Afghan security and coalition forces. A friendly government in the west is in the best interest of Pakistan. India in the last 20 years has had good relations with Afghan governments, NDS and terrorist organisations operating from there. The deal was not possible without Pakistan's support. Pakistan considerable influence over the Taliban succeeded in bringing them to the negotiating table. The New York Times termed the US withdrawal as a victory for Pakistan.

The US spent a trillion dollars and there were no gains. The Taliban think they have won the war and are confident of their victory in any future struggle internally as well. The one concern is that if no agreement is concluded on power sharing between the various groups in Afghanistan, this may lead to another civil war and yet another influx of refugees into Pakistan.

Today, the Taliban are more confident that they will achieve military victory because they ... **P3**

By Matthew Komatsu

During My Three Tours in Afghanistan, I Become an Old Man

You watch sporadic drops of rain blotch the sidewalk outside your office on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska, and think of watching for the first time as rain fell into the dust of Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, nearly nineteen years ago, in 2002. How it cratered into what the Afghan linguists half-jokingly told you was the result of decades of artillery having pounded the soil into fine powder. How the raindrops disappeared into the parched stuff. How you could drive through the inches of it that seemed to cover the whole of the Shomali Plains, only for it to wash back over the tire tracks.

The news that President Biden will begin a military withdrawal that will conclude on September 11th came as no surprise. When he released his interim national security guidance last month, you tore through it, highlighting passages and making margin notes. Look, you told your squadron commanders and chief master sergeants during a professional development session: For the first time since 9/11, there's

no mention of combating violent extremism across the globe. "Afghanistan" twice versus "Russia" five times and "China" fifteen. A signal that perhaps the Forever War was ending, that after years of consensus across the national security establishment that the military needed to re-focus on preparing to fight rival nations, the moment had arrived.

Your wing has just ended an exercise of several days meant to prepare for that fight, which some believe is close. And you cannot help but consider yourself, a career airman who entered the profession of arms as an 18-year-old kid on a rainy Colorado Springs day in June of 1995 and commissioned four years later with a plan to do the five years he owed Uncle Sam as a graduate of the Air Force Academy, then jump ship. Who realized on 9/11 that he couldn't voluntarily leave the military, and would deploy to Afghanistan three times between 2002 and 2012? Who somewhere along the way became the Old Man, trying to ready those you lead for an imagined conflict

that won't look anything like the very real war that your career will barely outlast? It's a strange thing, being a lifer.

But all that's too clean a narrative arc, isn't it? One might picture you as a sure-footed military man with a passing appreciation for the past. A guy who says huh when he pauses to take stock of his life. It's true in some regards (You're a lifer after all, comfortable with the accompanying expectations.) But beneath the facade, you're a bit of a mess.

God, but it all felt so righteous back in 2001 and 2002. So purposeful. The nation had rallied behind the mission to bring our enemies to justice. You were going to find bin Laden and everyone else on the rogue's deck of cards and make them pay. As a 26-year-old first lieutenant, you stood at attention on Bagram Air Base saluting Old Glory on the first anniversary of 9/11. Never forget why we're here, you told your team of counterintelligence agents. Many Afghans loved America, or so it seemed. You walked off-base for kebabs and naan wearing only

pistols, brought rifles only when you wanted to show off, and asked your sources where the Taliban were. Pakistan, they said. Sure, there was unfinished business in Afghanistan. The sporadic rocket attacks. The occasional intelligence report of Taliban massing in the hills. But you shrugged it off. Nation building is messy.

You left a hopeful trail of footprints in a blanket of fresh snow when you walked to your awaiting C-130 on Christmas night of 2002. But when you returned in 2008 to the war you seemed to be winning when you left, the dun-colored landscape of Kandahar found you changed, having survived deploying to the war in Iraq that divided your nation, and nearly killed you. You were hardened: a cynic, survivor, and newly minted combat rescue officer trained to save pilots shot down behind enemy lines who instead found himself flying several medical evacuations missions a day to pull wounded Canadians and Dutch soldiers from where they lay dying in the Afghan dust. You almost died in a helicopter crash. And then you came back in 2012, and little had changed or improved but still you hoped, and once again, you almost died. You returned home once more, checked career boxes, ascendant,

until it was no longer you headed out the door; it was the men and women you led who returned to Afghanistan. To the fight you never finished, and neither did they.

It's okay to admit that you miss it. That once in a while you look at the ribbons emblazoned with "V" for valor, with pride and just a touch of wistfulness. You are not burdened with the killer's guilt, for you never killed; your job only ever to protect and save. No, it is the fact that you survived when others did not that still cuts. You wear the names of dead comrades and grieve to think of your last memory of them. You do not ask yourself if it was all worth it—not just the war itself, but the refusal to leave it implicit in your decision to continue to serve — because the answer is complicated. You try not to think about the cost the Afghans have borne since 2001 by telling yourself that they've been bearing that cost since the Soviets showed up a half-century ago and yet they persist. You tell yourself it was always going to end this way, but you do not lie and say you always knew as much. Yet you cannot help but ask yourself how it came to this, because you always believed your calling was to ensure that it did not. You held on to the brief glimmers of hope—the ... **P3**

Labor Ministry: Over 100K Afghans to Work in Saudi Arabia, UAE

The program to send Afghan jobseekers abroad to countries under Gulf territory has been finalized, and the first batch of workers will soon be sent abroad with work visas, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs said on Friday.

Bashir Ahmad Tahyaj, the minister of labor and social affairs, said Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are interested in employing Afghan citizens, and work visas are being provided.

Sending Afghan workers to Khaleej countries is a program that the Afghan Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has been working on for many years, but only now does the initiative appear possible.

Afghanistan's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs said the program has been finalized and soon 10 thousand workers will be sent to the United Arab Emirates and 100 thousand workers will travel to Saudi Arabia.

"We are trying to arrange the first flight of Afghan workers abroad in the year 1400, and this would be a



revolution in the Afghan job market," said Tahyanj.

Nevertheless, some Afghan citizens doubt that the process really has begun, and say the government has made such promises many times in the past.

"The Afghan workers are going to Khaleej countries, Saudi Arabia, and other foreign countries because there is no work in their home country," said Haqmal Masoudzai, a resident in Paktia province.

Paktia resident Ahmadullah Ahmad

said: "This promise has not been fulfilled yet. The unemployment problem is getting worse day by day in the country. When there is no job for our workers, certainly they face economic challenges."

According to figures provided by international organizations, the unemployment rate has grown drastically in recent years in Afghanistan. As a result, a significant part of Afghan youth who are seeking jobs is striving to travel to foreign countries, even via illegal routes.

"One side is the visa problem, on the other side is even if they (workers) get visas, there is no work abroad. If there is work, surely it will not be very easy" said Zalmai, A resident of Paktia.

According to figures provided by Afghan agencies, hundreds of thousands of Afghan workers are currently in the Khaleej countries, but most of them traveled with a passport from a second country, as most countries do not grant visas for Afghan passports.

Rebels Shoot...

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won a second term in the general elections November last year, but the military said rigging of the polls had forced it to seize power. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in the country, pro-democracy protests have taken place in cities and towns across the country since then as the junta killed a total of 765 protesters so far. The UN and rights groups have expressed concern over the use of disproportionate force by the military junta on unarmed protesters.

US: 4 Dead...

later today when the area reopens." San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria said on Twitter that the city's firefighters, lifeguards, and police assisted the U.S. Coast Guard and Port of San Diego Harbor Police in the rescue effort.

"I ask San Diegans to keep the boat's passengers in your prayers," he noted.

Four days earlier, the U.S. authorities detained 21 Mexican nationals after a panga boat was stopped off about 11 miles west of the Point Loma shoreline, reported KGTV, an ABC-affiliated television station.

Iran Concerned...

government and we have told other groups that we can facilitate the Taliban's talks with the government."

We hope that the future situation will be stable, he added.

Regarding Iran's possible participation at the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan, he said: "Attending the Istanbul Summit is an issue that we will comment on in the future."

Calls Grow...

International.

While the EU delegation in Afghanistan, in a joint statement, said, "A free, independent and strong media sector are essential parts of an inclusive and representative Afghanistan. The media is integral to building public opinion and support for peace and any

future political settlement to the conflict. We recognize that female journalists and media professionals are particularly at risk." In its latest annual report, published in March, the Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ) said it had registered more than 100 cases of aggression – including murder, death threats, physical attacks

and insults – against women journalists in the past year. "The precarity of Afghan women journalists has increased not only as a result of the physical dangers but also as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown," CPAWJ director Farida Nekzad said. "At least 20% of them have lost their jobs or have been forced to take unpaid leave by their employers."

During My Three...

schools, the wells, the roads—until the very end, until you finally knew for certain: American exceptionalism was no match for the Graveyard of Nations. The schools were abandoned, the wells ran dry, and the roads became battlegrounds. The land taken with the blood of the dead you bore was lost once again.

And yet you wonder, because you are a lifer after all: What if bin Laden had died in the Shah-i-Kot in March 2002, as was intended? Whether, if that happened, you'd have been home by Christmas

of 2002, like you were told. You can just imagine it. Looking back over your shoulder at the C-130 through the snow on Bagram that night, and not seeing not much at all really. Maybe a couple of tents for the last of the last troops out. You can smell it, I know it – the drift of woodsmoke will never not remind you of the smell of the Afghans' earth ovens – coming from the airfield tower, where the Afghans who received the base back from us are cooking a meal. Clear air above the Shomali, and the moonlit foothills of the Hindu

Kush beyond. Who knows what tomorrow will bring, but tomorrow is not your problem? Tonight, it's done.

It's only. It's morning. Raining again. Or at least it's gray once again. Spring, an ugly season, has arrived in Alaska once again. The snow's disappearing and roads will go dry. A haze of dust has already risen off the gravel that kept the roads drivable over the long winter. In a few weeks, the landscape will turn from dirty white to green. Not long now until the birds sing: poo-tee-weet.

Taliban, US in...

Ehsan Nairo said. However, Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh at an event on Monday called the Taliban a rebellious and fugitive group that is thirsty for power.

"The Taliban, because it has turned away from peace, is considered a fugitive group

because, based on a verse of the Holy Quran, if a group violates the call for peace, it is considered violent and fugitive," Danesh said.

Khalilzad also met with peace negotiators in Doha during his trip to Qatar last week.

"Efforts to hold the upcoming Turkey conference were

welcomed. And the US envoy assured his country's continued support to the government and the people of Afghanistan," said Ghulam Farooq Majroh, a republic negotiator. The Istanbul conference was delayed two times because the Taliban backed out. It is expected to be held late this month.

End of The...

negotiated from a position of strength. Power sharing arrangements need to be worked out and a political map acceptable to all in Afghanistan must be made. India needs to roll back its presence in Afghanistan and stop its anti-

Pakistan activities from its consulate in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar Shareef. India should also be asked to wind up their terrorist training camps. Pakistan has paid a heavy price in the socio-economic, security and political fields for its role in Afghanistan. Pakistan

would continue with its effort for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. The Afghan government must cease the opportunity for peace according to the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan. Without peace in Afghanistan, there can be no peace in Pakistan.

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UK Hosts First In-Person G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Two Years

The Group of Seven (G7) foreign and development ministers gathered Monday in London for the first time in two years to address such issues as economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

According to a statement released by the British government on Monday, G7 countries will sign up to new global targets to get 40 million more girls into school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 in the next five years.

The meeting, which runs until Wednesday, will also see minister's commitment to investing 15 billion U.S. dollars in development finance over the next two years to help women in developing countries access jobs, build businesses and respond to the economic

impacts of COVID-19, according to the statement.

Charities have welcomed the pledge, but said it was at odds with Britain's decision to cut its overseas aid spending, according to the BBC. British government announced last year it would cut the country's aid spending from 0.7 percent of national income to 0.5 percent -- a reduction of more than 4 billion pounds (about 5.5 billion dollars).

"We know the reality of these aid cuts," Gwen Hines from Save the Children told the BBC.

"Life-changing, life-saving support (is) being pulled from families in the middle of a pandemic from schooling, medicine and food. I just don't see how that is global leadership at a time when the UK is hosting the G7 summit," Hines said. ... **P2**



A look at the world

US: 4 Dead, 27 injured in Smuggling Vessel Accident in San Diego

Three people were killed and 27 others injured after a suspected smuggling vessel overturned Sunday off the coast of the U.S. city of San Diego, authorities said.

The accident took place at about 10 a.m. local time (1700 GMT) off the coast of the Point Loma peninsula near the Cabrillo Monument, which is San Diego's only National Park, according to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department.

Lifeguards received the initial notification of the vessel in question experiencing trouble via VHF radio from a tow vessel that was in the area. The reporting party indicated that one person was on board, said the department in a release.



Multiple agencies responded to the scene immediately. Officials said that lifeguards responding to the area found a cabin cruiser, which had broken apart against the rocks off the coast, and 30 people were in the water. Jeffery Stephenson of the San Diego sector of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol told reporters that officials had "every indication" from their perspective that "this is a smuggling vessel used to smuggle migrants into the United States illegally."

"We haven't confirmed the nationality of people involved. But our agents are with many of them at the hospital and the man who we believe was the operator," he added. "The ocean is inherently unsafe. The reality is crossing the border illegally is unsafe no matter the method," Stephenson noted, slamming smugglers who treat people as commodities.

"They don't care about the people they're exploiting. All they care about is profit to them," he said.

Park officials of the Cabrillo Monument said on Twitter after the incident that the tidepools of the park "are temporarily closed" and they "will post an update ... **P3**

Al-Baghdadi's Right-Hand Man Captured in Istanbul



In a big development, an Afghan national code-named "Basim", also slain terrorist leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's right-hand man, has been captured in Istanbul in a joint operation by Turkish intelligence and police, reports stated on Monday.

The Afghan national has been detained in the Ataşehir district on the city's Asian side, according to an Istanbul police statement, Daily Sabah reported.

News reports of the joint operation with Turkey's intelligence agency said the suspect had been involved in helping hide Al-Baghdadi in Syria's Idlib province after the fall of the terror group in 2019. Basim was suspected of organizing training for Daesh while in Syria and Iraq, as well as serving on its decision-making council. He arrived in Turkey with a false passport and identity card.

Al-Baghdadi was killed in a US military operation in Syria in 2019. Reports said that Turkish intelligence played a key role in the death of al-Baghdadi by detaining and extraditing one of his aides to Iraq, who provided US authorities with critical information for locating the vicious man.

Turkish security forces have nabbed at least 850 suspects with links to Daesh in the first three months of 2021, dealing a heavy blow to the terrorist group's presence in the country and its activities in the region. Being one of the first countries that recognized Daesh as a terrorist group in 2013, Turkey has been frequently conducting domestic and cross-border operations against the group for years in order to eliminate a major global terrorism threat.

In 2021's domestic operations, 145 of those 850 -- which includes several senior figures -- have been imprisoned and some of them have been also repatriated.

In addition, documents and ammunition belonging to the terrorist group were seized during these operations. **P3**

Rebels Shoot Down Myanmar Military Helicopter

Amid ongoing resistance against the military junta, a powerful rebel group in Myanmar claimed to have shot down a military helicopter on Monday.

A spokesperson for the Kachin Independent Army, one of the most powerful rebel groups in the northernmost state of Kachin bordering China, told Anadolu Agency that the incident occurred during an airstrike by the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw.

"The Tatmadaw launched airstrikes a few days ago, but today's action includes three jet fighters and a helicopter. We shoot down the helicopter at around 10 a.m. (0330GMT) today," said Col. Naw Bu, an information officer for the rebel group.



He declined to say what type of arms was used to shoot down the military helicopter.

He claimed that Monday's airstrike targeted the Alaw Bun hill in the Moemauk township near the Myanmar-China border in Kachin that was considered by both sides strategically important for gaining the military upper hand over the surrounding areas.

A medical student, who is a resident of Yangon but now in Kachin state waiting to join the combat training, has witnessed the shot down of the helicopter.

"The helicopter was hit by an FN-6 portable missile fired by the Kachin fighters. It was on fire in the sky and crashed near a village," she told Anadolu Agency over the phone on Monday, on condition of anonymity.

The military has not made any announcement yet over the incident.

The Southeast Asian nation has been going through an upheaval since Feb. 1 when armed forces chief Min Aung Hlaing ousted an elected government led by State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint in the country's first coup since 1988.

The junta also detained Suu Kyi, Myint, and 3,555 other people following the coup, bringing an end to a decade of fragile civilian rule. ... **P3**



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