

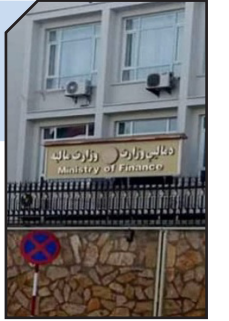


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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Sunday, May 23, 2021

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10 afs



**8 Soldiers, 20 Taliban Killed as Clashes Continue in Baghlan**

Eight members of the Afghan forces were killed in an attack by the Taliban on their outposts in Guzargah-e-Noor district in Baghlan on Friday night, two sources from security agencies in the province said on Saturday.

The Defense Ministry in a statement said that 20 Taliban including Amrullah, the designated district governor of Taliban for the district, were killed in Afghan forces air and ground operations in Guzargah-e-Noor, Julga and Baghlan-e-Jadid districts of Baghlan on Friday night.

Six soldiers were wounded in the attack that started at midnight, the sources said.

Dozens of Taliban fighters went to Guzargah-e-Noor district after they were pushed back from Baghlan-e-Markazi district in the province, the sources said. The 217 Pamir Corp Commander Abbas Tawakuli said that six Taliban, ... **P3**



**Afghanistan Losing Its Wildlife to War, Poaching and Climate Change**

At least 149 species of animal are in danger of disappearing from Afghanistan, Afghan officials said Saturday.

According to the officials, war, climate change, animal-trafficking, and illegal hunting are the main cause of loss of wildlife in the country.

Marking International Day for Biological Diversity, May 22, Ezatullah Sediqi Deputy Head for the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan, stated: "Different species of animals are living in Afghanistan. Climate change, smuggling, hunting, and war have endangered the wildlife and plants in Afghanistan."

The officials, however, did not provide details on exactly what species this relates to in Afghanistan.

An estimated 1.9 million hectares of forest covers Afghanistan which is a natural shelter for various species of animals. But Afghan officials noted ... **P3**

## NYT: Biden is Right to Leave Afghanistan



When Joe Biden assumed the presidency in January, he embarked on a mission to reverse a slew of policies put in place by former President Donald Trump while leaving untouched the elite foreign policy consensus. Mr. Biden issued 42 executive orders in his first 100 days — more than any other president since Franklin

D. Roosevelt — and has waged a methodical campaign against Mr. Trump's agenda. With one major exception: Afghanistan.

Beginning with his campaign for the presidency, Mr. Trump railed against America's forever wars and pledged to bring American troops home and to get out of Afghanistan. Despite his rhetoric,

Mr. Trump vacillated between winding down some Obama-era lethal U.S. campaigns (in Pakistan and Libya) and expanding others (in Syria, Somalia and Yemen). He loosened the dubious Obama-era restrictions on killing civilians in airstrikes after suggesting, when he was a candidate, that the United States should kill the families

of suspected terrorists. He also reauthorized the C.I.A. to conduct drone operations after Barack Obama's administration shifted those powers to the Pentagon.

Mr. Trump basked in his self-perceived glory when in April 2017 the United States dropped the 21,600-pound "mother of all bombs," the most powerful nonnuclear weapon, on a village in Afghanistan. In 2019 alone, the United States carried out more than 2,400 airstrikes in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, Mr. Trump made a serious, if clumsy and contradictory, attempt in the latter half of his term to make good on his promise to end the Afghanistan war. His administration struck a deal with the Taliban, offering an American commitment to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by May 2021 for a Taliban promise not to allow the country to be used by transnational terrorists.

Congressional Democrats and a group of hawkish Republicans led by Representative Liz Cheney were intent on slow-walking the execution of the plan and sought to deny funding for U.S. ... **P3**

**Provincial Council Member Among Six Wounded in Badakhshan**

Local officials of Badakhshan province confirmed on Saturday that six people including Munira Allamyar, a member of the provincial council, were wounded in an explosion in PD5 of Faizabad city.

According to the officials the explosives were placed in a motorbike that targeted a vehicle of Allamyar.

Eyewitnesses say that three people including Allamyar, a member of the provincial council, were wounded. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.



## 20 Provinces Witness Clashes as More Areas Fall to Taliban

In more disturbing news coming in from Afghanistan, local officials confirmed that Jalriz district of Maidan Wardak province fell to the Taliban on Friday, but the Interior Ministry described it as a "tactical retreat". This is yet another district which was captured by the Taliban and this comes even as the withdrawal of international troops continue in full swing.

Representatives of Maidan Wardak province say the fall of Jalriz is dangerous for the central regions of Afghanistan, including Bamyan province. However, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) called the fall of Jalriz district a "tactical retreat" and stressed that security forces had "tactically retreated" from the district.

Khalil-ur-Rehman Yadegari, Jalriz district governor, said that the



district building was completely under Taliban control and added that one civilian and 21 soldiers were killed in the clashes.

The casualties of the Taliban have not yet been determined. "The district and command police of Jalriz district are now in the hands of the Taliban," Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesperson,

wrote in a message to the media. He also claimed to have acquired several military-mediated vehicles and some weapons and ammunition.

Meanwhile, Mahdi Rasekh, the representative of Maidan Wardak people in the House of Representatives, confirmed the fall of Jalriz district of ... **P2**

### Palestinians'...

which he couldn't do so far," he said. Palestinians' return to their lands is the only solution to the problem, Najafabadi said, noting that Israel would accept it only under pressure, and by power.

Tensions that started in East Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan spread to Gaza as a result of Israeli assaults on worshippers in the flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

The Israeli military staged airstrikes across the Gaza Strip since May 10, leaving behind a massive trail of destruction across the seaside territory.

The death toll from Israeli attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip which ended after a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas rose to 248, including 66 children and 39 women, the Palestinian Health Ministry said Friday.

At least 1,948 people have been injured, the ministry said in a statement regarding the loss of lives in 11 days of attacks by Israel.

A cease-fire between Israel and Palestinian resistance group, Hamas, started early Friday.

### 3M in Pakistan...

before being vaccinated must register themselves by sending their CNIC numbers to a designated official portal.

When asked about any alternative ways to get vaccinated for unregistered refugees or citizens who do not have the CNIC, Faisal Sultan, the prime minister's special assistant on health affairs, told Anadolu Agency that the refugees with "Proof of Registration (PoR)" cards issued by the Pakistani government were allowed to get vaccinated.

In the brief message, he did not respond to a query about an alternative way for unregistered refugees.

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

# Much about US Pullout from Afghanistan Is Unclear

When he pulled the plug on the American war in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden said the reasons for staying, 10 years after the death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, had become "increasingly unclear." Now that a final departure is in sight, questions about clarity have shifted to Biden's post-withdrawal plan.

What would the United States do, for example, if the Taliban took advantage of the U.S. military departure by seizing power? And, can the United States and the international community, through diplomacy and financial aid alone, prevent a worsening of the instability in Afghanistan that kept American and coalition troops there for two decades?

The Biden administration acknowledges that a full U.S. troop withdrawal is not without risks, but it argues that waiting for a better time to end U.S. involvement in the war is a recipe for never leaving, while extremist threats fester elsewhere.

"We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan, hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal, and expecting a different result," Biden said April 14 in announcing that "it's time to end America's longest war."

A look at some of the unanswered questions about Biden's approach to the withdrawal:

#### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE TROOPS ARE GONE?

Predictions range from the disastrous to the merely difficult. Officials don't rule out an intensified civil war that creates a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan which could spill over to other Central Asian nations, including nuclear-armed Pakistan. A more hopeful scenario is that the Kabul government makes peace with the Taliban insurgents.

At a Senate hearing Thursday, a senior Pentagon policy official, David Helvey, was asked how he could remain optimistic when, in just the first few weeks of the U.S. withdrawal, hundreds of Afghans were killed.

"I wouldn't say that I'm optimistic," Helvey replied, adding that a peace agreement is still possible.

#### HOW WILL AFGHAN FORCES HOLD UP?

The administration says it will urge Congress to continue authorizing billions of dollars in aid to the Afghan military and police, and the Pentagon says it is working on ways to provide aircraft maintenance support and advice from afar. Much of that work had



been done by U.S. contractors, who are departing along with U.S. troops. The U.S. military also might offer to fly some Afghan security forces to a third country for training.

But none of those things - the training, the advising or the financial backing - are assured.

Also unclear is whether the U.S. will provide air power in support of Afghan ground forces from bases outside the country.

The Afghan air force is central to the ongoing conflict, yet it remains dependent on U.S. contractors and technology. The Afghans, for example, have drones but not the kind that are armed, making them less effective in battle.

#### WILL THE TALIBAN ENLIST OR ASSIST AL-QAIDA?

In a February 2020 agreement with the Trump administration, the Taliban pledged to disavow al-Qaida, but that promise is yet to be tested. This is important in light of the Taliban's willingness during their years in power in the 1990s to provide haven for bin Laden and his al-Qaida colleagues.

Joseph J. Collins, a retired Army colonel who has studied the U.S. war in Afghanistan since it began, notes that as recently as two years ago the Pentagon was alerting Congress to enduring links between al-Qaida and the Taliban. In a June 2019 report, the Pentagon said al-Qaida and its Pakistan-based

affiliate, al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, "routinely support, train, work, and operate with Taliban fighters and commanders."

Collins is skeptical that the Taliban have genuinely renounced ties to al-Qaida.

"I don't think that leopard has changed its spots at all," he said in an interview.

Earlier this month, the U.S. government watchdog for Afghanistan reported to Congress that al-Qaida relies on the Taliban for protection. The report, citing information provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency in April, said, "the two groups have reinforced ties over the past decades, likely making it difficult for an organizational split to occur."

#### WHAT BECOMES OF U.S. COUNTERTERRORIST EFFORTS?

The Pentagon says that all U.S. special operations forces will leave no later than Sept. 11. That will make counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, including the collecting of intelligence on al-Qaida and other extremist groups, more difficult but not impossible.

The administration's answer to this problem is to continue the fight from "over the horizon." This is a concept familiar to the military, whose geographic reach has expanded with the advent of armed drones and other technologies. ... **P3**

By J.P. LAWRENCE

## Allies Leaving Rapidly as NATO Ends Afghanistan Training Mission

Some NATO allies and other coalition countries that first deployed service members to Afghanistan in the war's early years are leaving months ahead of the Sept. 11 deadline set by the Biden administration for all U.S. forces to depart, several defense officials said.

The mission to "train, advise and assist" Afghan partners that coalition partners had engaged in is over, although informal assistance and advising continues with senior officials in the Afghan military and government.

The focus is now on withdrawal, which has prompted conflicting emotions from America's partners in Afghanistan. More than 1,100 troops from 40 non-U.S. NATO and partner countries have been killed during the war, alongside more than 2,300 U.S. service members. For Dutch troops at Camp Marmal near the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, the bar where troops used to hang out has been dismantled, as has the monument to 25 of their comrades who died in the war. A soldier is collecting anything

historically significant and sending some of the pieces to the Netherlands' Rijksmuseum.

There's a lot of work to do, said Capt. Marvin, commander of a unit in charge of the withdrawal. The captain insisted on being identified only by his first name for security reasons.

A ceremony on May 16 represented the only real time for reflection amid the packing up.

"That was really a moment for everybody: 'this is it,'" he said.

Dutch troops could be out by sometime in July, the Dutch Defense Ministry said last week.

Troops from Austria, a non-NATO country that joined the coalition at the outset, also expect to be gone by July, the country's defense ministry said in a statement.

Portuguese soldiers who protect a base at Kabul's international airport will pull out by the end of May, although some high-ranking officers will remain, a military spokesman from Lisbon said.

Troops from Spain, New Zealand and Croatia have already departed, spokesmen for those countries

said. Germany, which led the military efforts from 15 nations in Afghanistan's north, will be one of the last countries to leave, officials there have said.

Last month, German Defense Ministry spokesman David Helmbold told reporters in Berlin that a July 4 pullout date was being considered for its roughly 1,000 troops, The Associated Press reported. Other estimates from German officials have extended as far out as mid-August.

The movement of troops and equipment back to Germany began in earnest around mid-May. The Taliban have stepped up attacks and surrounded provincial capitals across the country as the withdrawal continues, said a report this week to Congress by the Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

Some European countries, worried by the high levels of violence in Afghanistan, have pledged to continue financially supporting the country's government, as well as advocating for peace ... **P3**

### 20 Provinces...

Maidan Wardak to the Taliban and said that 69 security and defense forces with their equipment and hundreds of weapons had surrendered to this group.

The MP in the House of Representatives briefly accused the security agencies of insisting that the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior ignored the voices of Jalrez soldiers and did not send them help. Rasekh wrote on his Facebook page, "Jalriz district of Maidan Wardak has been under complete siege by the Taliban for more than two years and there has been continuous and intense fighting for the last three days and nights. But they did not help, the soldiers and district officials made their last efforts and sacrifices; "But ammunition, livelihoods and aid did not arrive. The central government is responsible for the fall of Jalrez." Sharifullah Hotak, a member of the Maidan Wardak provincial council, also confirmed that security forces had been under siege in the district for five days; but they did not receive any help, and at 9am on Friday, the district fell to the Taliban.

Defense Ministry spokesperson Ruhollah Ahmadzai did not say anything about the fall of Jalrez, but stressed that the Taliban were in control of parts of the district. "There is a regular plan of security and defense agencies in Maidan Wardak province, especially in Jalriz district," Ahmadzai said.

Meanwhile, Fawad Aman, deputy spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Defense, tweeted that 10 militants had been killed in an airstrike on a Taliban compound. At 10:48am today, 10 terrorists were killed in an airstrike on a terrorist gathering place in Jalriz district of Maidan Wardak.

The defense and security forces continue their air and ground operations against terrorists in Jalrez. "Jalriz will be cleared of terrorists."

Currently in about 20 provinces including Baghlan, Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Laghman, Maidan Wardak and a number of other provinces, fierce clashes continue between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban, with heavy casualties reported on both sides.

# Wolasi jirga: '\$8 Million Embezzled Daily' at Customs

The Afghan acting minister of finance on Wednesday did not deny claims by lawmakers in Parliament who alleged that \$8 million worth of revenue is being embezzled at customs on a daily basis, but he did say there are reports of corruption involving governors, police commanders, employees of the Ministry of Finance as well as ordinary citizens.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Commerce and Industries said that there is also extortion on the highways, and mentioned that along with corruption, the poor economy is a factor.

The two cabinet ministers made the remarks during a session in Parliament. Both were summoned by the Wolesi Jirga, the house of representatives, to account for the recent fires that destroyed fuel trucks in Herat, Farah and Kabul provinces.

"The vehicles get stopped in large numbers and then problems are created," said an MP from Kandahar, Gul Ahmad Kamin.

"The businessmen are leaving the country due to corruption and the policy that exists in your ministry right now," said MP Shagofa Noorzai.



Meanwhile, other lawmakers criticized the large salaries of some government employees.

"The head of Breshna Sherkat (Afghanistan's main electricity supplying body) is around 619,000 Afs, the head of ATRA also receives nearly 600,000 Afs, which is equal to the salaries of 100 teachers," said MP Abdul Rauf Enaami.

"\$8 million is being embezzled at customs on a daily basis, I think it is not less than the oppression and treason that the armed opponents impose on

the Afghan people," said MP Mir Haidar Afzali.

"Unfortunately, in some areas, it is the governors, the local police commanders, commissioners and anyone who has the power (doing corruption)," said Mohammad Khaled Payenda, the acting minister of finance.

"For instance, in one province where the president had made a trip--after his trip, one of the heads of the Haj and Pilgrimage department telephoned and told his colleague: 'I did not

disclose your name and now you must send me my share," added Payenda.

"Everywhere there is plundering; they are looting the businessmen," said Nisar Ahmad Ghoryani, the minister of commerce and industries.

The minister of transport did not attend the session and lawmakers called for him to be impeached in the near future.

Despite persistent calls by lawmakers, the minister of finance did not disclose the names of those accused of corruption.

### Allies Leaving...

through diplomatic channels after withdrawal.

The withdrawals mean that Afghanistan's security forces soon will no longer be able to rely on NATO and coalition troops for air support and other help.

Lt. Col. Catalin Gradinariu, a Romanian adviser, recently returned home after helping close Kandahar Airfield, which was handed over to the Afghan military in mid-May. Gradinariu is one of 32,000 troops from Romania who served in Afghanistan, with 27 losing their lives.

Gradinariu arrived on his first tour at Kandahar in 2003. He returned four more times, experiencing the early days of the war, the counterinsurgency campaign during the 2010 troop surge, the advising mission, and finally the withdrawal.

Gradinariu said he believes Afghanistan's military has improved significantly since the U.S. and its partner countries first arrived. He said he was sad to leave the country where he spent the "peak" of his military career. "A lot of my life was in Afghanistan, Gradinariu said. "You think about five tours, that means a lot of time. But hey, it's time to say goodbye."

### 8 Soldiers...

including their key commander, were killed and seven more were wounded in the clashes.

He said that the Taliban left the area after reinforcements arrived.

The commander said that Afghan forces also suffered casualties in the attack but did not provide exact details. This comes amidst a sharp increase in violence in the country following a three-day ceasefire from May 13 to May 15.

### NYT: Biden is...

troop reductions in Afghanistan. There are also indications that some Pentagon and intelligence officials tried to stymie the plan, perhaps hoping that Mr. Biden would scrap the deal and Mr. Trump's timeline for withdrawal.

Mr. Biden announced that while he did not agree with all of the particulars of Mr. Trump's plan and timeline, he would move forward with them. "It is perhaps not what I would have negotiated myself, but it was an agreement made by the United States government, and that means something," Mr. Biden said.

His decision was a bold one. There are powerful voices among Washington insiders, including the former secretaries of state Hillary

Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, pushing for him to reverse course. A recent report from the congressionally commissioned Afghanistan Study Group also advised Mr. Biden against withdrawing U.S. troops. As Responsible Statecraft first reported, two of the group's co-chairs and a majority of its 12 other members have current or recent financial ties to defense contractors that profit from the proliferation of American wars.

The Afghan government, aid organizations, corporations and other entities with an ongoing presence in Afghanistan rely on contractors for everything from logistics to security. In the post-9/11 wars, the number of contractors on the ground has consistently dwarfed that of uniformed

military personnel. Mr. Biden may be officially ending the U.S. military's official involvement, but it is still unknown how many of these private sector forces will follow suit or continue in the gray zones that have riddled the landscape of America's forever wars.

Even as the Pentagon says that it will withdraw its contractors, there are signs that the privatized aspects of the war may continue. The private security company Triple Canopy is hiring armed guards to operate at several sites in Afghanistan beyond the Sept. 11, 2021, withdrawal date announced by Mr. Biden. Its parent company, Constellis, also owns Academi, the most recent name for Blackwater, the notorious mercenary firm founded by Erik Prince.

### Much about...

But will it work? The administration has yet to make any basing or access agreements with countries bordering Afghanistan, such as Uzbekistan. So it might have to rely, at least at the start, on forces positioned in and around the Persian Gulf, meaning response times will be much longer.

WHAT ABOUT DIPLOMACY? The administration says it will retain a U.S. Embassy presence, but that will become more difficult if the military's departure leads to a collapse of

Afghan governance.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters this past week that securing access to the Kabul international airport will be key to enabling the United States and other nations to maintain embassies. He said the U.S. and NATO allies are considering an international effort to secure that airport. A related problem is the fate of Afghan civilians who might be targeted by the Taliban or other groups for aiding the U.S. war effort. Interpreters and others who worked for the

U.S. government or NATO can get what is known as a special immigrant visa, or SIV, but the application process can take years.

Washington's special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, has told Congress the administration wants to protect those civilians, but that it is trying to avoid the panic that might erupt if it appeared the United States was encouraging "the departure of all educated Afghans" in a way that undermined the morale of Afghan security forces.

### Afghanistan...

of information about the exact number of animals at risk and the lack of a clear policy for the protection of wildlife in the country.

Qasim Haidari, a Deputy Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) official stated: "Every

bullet fired and explosions that occurred have made most of the birds migrate to other countries."

In addition to the war, Afghan officials stated that deforestation in the country has remained another issue ahead of wildlife protection.

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# UN to Allocate Additional \$4.5 Mln to Gaza Strip Aid

The United Nations has allocated additional \$4.5 mln worth of aid to the Gaza Strip after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was declared, UN Secretary General Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told a briefing on Friday. "The emergency relief coordinator today allocated \$4.5 mln on the central emergency response fund towards the rising humanitarian needs in Gaza in addition to \$14.5 mln announced earlier this week for the occupied Palestinian territory," he said.

The Israeli army and Palestinian radicals in the Gaza Strip have been exchanging missile strikes since May 10, following the outbreak of violence near the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem's Old City in early May, when more than 700 Palestinians were injured. According to the latest data, at least 12 Israelis and over 250 Palestinians have been killed. A ceasefire was launched at 02:00 am on May 21.



### A look at the world

#### 3M in Pakistan Lacking Ids May Miss Out On COVID-19 Jobs

A prove-your-identity condition may leave 3 million people in Pakistan without coronavirus vaccines, including mainly unregistered refugees, jeopardizing the country's fight against the pandemic. Currently, only Pakistani nationals or immigrants who have either computerized national identification cards (CNIC) or official refugee status can receive the jobs. The country of over 207 million people has so far vaccinated nearly 3 million people, a ratio well below that of neighboring India. Over 1.5 million unregistered refugees living in Pakistan, particularly from neighboring Afghanistan, will miss out on the vaccination for not having identity documents.



Besides, thousands of CNIC have been blocked in recent years by the country's registration authority, the National Database Registration Authority (Nadra), for different reasons.

There are around 2.8 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees in Pakistan, making it the world's second-largest refugee population after Syrians in Turkey.

Only around half of the refugees are registered, with the rest living undocumented, mostly in northeastern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and southwestern Balochistan provinces, which border the war-torn Afghanistan.

The southern Sindh province, of which the commercial hub Karachi is the capital, also hosts nearly 500,000 Afghan refugees.

UN suggest that more than 3.8 million refugees have been repatriated to Afghanistan since 2002. However, many have returned to Pakistan due to ongoing violence, unemployment, and lack of education and medical facilities.

Apart from Afghan refugees, the South Asian country, and mainly Karachi, has a sizable population of unregistered Bengali, Nepali, and Rohingya immigrants.

As per the current procedure, citizens ... **P2**

#### Palestinians' Return to Their Lands Is Only Solution to Conflict



Homayoun Sameyah Najafabadi, a Jewish-Iranian lawmaker and chair of the Tehran Jewish Association gave an exclusive interview to Anadolu Agency on Friday in which he railed against Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

He said that Israel disrespected the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first qibla of Muslims, and killed innocent Palestinians.

"Any authentic faithful Jew, who believes in the Torah should condemn the brutal attacks on Palestinians," he said.

Najafabadi underlined the importance of having respect for things, places and people -- not only religions but those recognized as sacred, while noting that the Israeli government acted otherwise toward Palestinians.

"Palestinians' pride and belief were insulted," said Najafabadi.

He argued that Israeli attacks caused more tension between Muslim Arabs and Jewish, and warned Jewish people about supporting Israel.

While it is an undeniable fact that some segments of the world's Jewish population support Israel, faithful Jews, who do not have regional and ethnic biases, support Palestinians, he said.

"The Jewish community in Iran condemn brutal killings of Palestinians," he said.

Najafabadi criticized the world's stance regarding the Palestinian issue and maintained that global superpowers benefit from tension in the Middle East.

"World powers are concerned only about their national and individual interests. They should be sincere about human rights and oppose the inhuman killings," he said.

Najafabadi maintained that Israeli domestic politics and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's political ambitions are mixed up with the most recent aggression against Palestinians.

"I am convinced that war and attacks were pre-meditated. Escalation of the tension and eruption of war consolidate feelings of solidarity in a country. Netanyahu wanted to take advantage of a war to form a coalition government, ... **P2**

#### Tibet Has Lifted 628,000 People Out Of Poverty

Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region lifted 628,000 people out of poverty and delisted 74 county-level areas from the poverty list, said Wu Yingjie, secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Regional Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), at a press conference of the State Council Information Office on Saturday.

The per capita disposable income for the region's rural residents in 2020 rose by 12.7 percent to reach 14,598 yuan (about \$2,270), a double-digit increase for 18 consecutive years, Wu added.

By the end of 2019, all the 628,000 registered



poor people and 74 poor counties in the region had shaken off poverty, marking the end of absolute poverty in Tibet for the first time in history.

Meanwhile, the Chinese central government allocated an accumulative investment of 1.63 trillion yuan (about \$253 billion) in the 70 years after the peaceful liberation of Tibet, he said, adding that the southwestern autonomous region also received a total of 69.3 billion yuan of funds from other provincial and municipal governments in recent years.

Over 590 billion yuan of the total investment were put into the construction of a spate of major projects that have greatly driven the region's economic development, including the Sichuan-Tibet Highway and Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

On May 23, 1951, an agreement on the peaceful liberation of Tibet was signed. The document, known as the 17-Article Agreement, opened a new chapter in Tibet's history.

China on Friday issued a white paper on the peaceful liberation of Tibet and its development over the past seven decades.



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