

As U.S. Pullout Nears, Groups with Seattle Ties That Work with Afghan Youth Face Uncertain Future

Page 2 | NATIONAL
Afghan Peace

Marnie Gustavson lives and works in a tree-shaded Kabul compound near the site of a triple bombing two weeks ago that killed dozens of...

Page 3 | ECONOMY
Fruit Farmers, Exporters Seek Market for Products

Page 2 | NATIONAL

Kabul
31 / 16



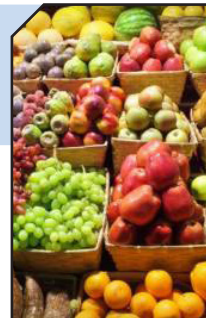
Herat
39 / 21



Nangarhar
42 / 25



Balkh
40 / 27



Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Wednesday, June 2, 2021

Issue No. 966

www.heartofasia.af

10 afs

Over 6 Million Children At Risk In Afghanistan



According to him, a child protection network is currently operating in 200 districts and child protection centers have been established in Kabul, Bamyan, Balkh and Nangarhar provinces. Afghanistan is a country at war, he said, adding that children are at risk of being abducted on the one hand, and large numbers of children are being harmed as a result of the war. The Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs emphasized the cooperation of the people and international institutions with the Ministry and said that the Government of Afghanistan, especially the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, alone could not address the challenges of children. Statistics from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs show that 490 orphanages provide services to 25,000 to 30,000 children. Of these, more than 10,000 orphans live in 68 public and private orphanages. Meanwhile, Susan Farahman, UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, said that since 2000, 10 million people in Afghanistan have been added to the list of children learning, playing and improving in schools. Farahman also said that the number of well-grown children has increased by 24% compared to 2004.

China Can Play Critical Role In Peace Process: Ambassador

Kabul: China can play a major role in the regional peace process as the US withdraws from Afghanistan, said Afghan Ambassador to China Javid Qaem on Tuesday.

A prominent advantage that China enjoys is that it has good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan and can play a critical role in building trust between these two neighboring countries, and the trust is the real thing that will bring long-lasting peace in the region, said the ambassador.

The ambassador made the remarks at a press conference held at the embassy in Beijing, where he briefed Chinese journalists on the current status of civilian casualties and the US troop's withdrawal.

Since the US announced its final withdrawal, there have been mounting worries about the security ... **P2**



US To Continue Securing Kabul Airport

Kabul: Ross Wilson, Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Kabul, said that his country will continue to work together to secure Kabul International Airport. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release that the Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Kabul raised the issue on Monday during a meeting with Minister of Foreign Mohammad Hanif Atmar. Referring to the bilateral security agreements between Afghanistan and the United States, he said that his country is committed to cooperating to develop the security sector; in particular, the security of Kabul airport will continue. Ross Wilson also reassured continued US support for the country's defense and security forces. Mohammad Hanif Atmar called the continuation of US financial and training support to the defense and security forces and its financial and development assistance after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan important.

The Foreign Ministry said that the two sides also discussed the peace process in Afghanistan. ... **P3**

Over 50% of Students at Herat University Are Girls

56 percent of the applicants for the university entrance exam this year in Herat were girls.

Young women make up more than 50% of students at Herat University in the western province of Herat, with 5,500 enrolled in 71 different departments, according to data provided by the university.

Herat University has at least 11,000 students.

Also, 56 percent of the applicants for the university entrance exam this year in Herat were girls.

Ozra Aziz, who recently graduated with a master's degree, says ... **P3**



EU Mission in Afghanistan to Stay Despite Troop Withdrawal

The EU mission in Afghanistan has reiterated its commitment to supporting the war-torn country, as international troops continue to withdraw.

Tomas Niklasson, Acting Special Envoy of the European Union for Afghanistan, stated: "As troops are withdrawn, our intention is to stay. Our policy has not changed, our mission hasn't changed, our commitment to the Afghan people has not changed," Niklasson stated.

Addressing the EU parliament on Saturday, Niklasson added that the circumstances in Afghanistan are changing and that "we need to make sure that we can adapt to these changes. To remain engaged."

This comes as foreign forces officially started to withdraw



from Afghanistan early this month.

The US forces stated that they have handed over five military bases and an airport to the Afghan forces so far.

Meanwhile, some Afghan MPs

stated that the EU's continued support to Afghanistan is crucial. MP Khan Aqa Rezaie stated: "The EU and some foreign countries' stay in Afghanistan to continue supporting the Afghan forces and the government is very vital."

China Can...

situation in Afghanistan. Violence has escalated across many Afghan provinces.

“Since 2014, we have been fighting by ourselves, except for some air support from the US for our national security forces,” said the ambassador, who is confident about defeating the Taliban. He said around 1,500 Taliban fighters were killed by Afghan forces in May.

“We have 350,000 national security forces, among whom there are special forces. We don’t have any fear of losing ground. I don’t see a lot of changes along with the withdrawal. The withdrawal would be a surprise more to the Taliban than to us. There is no other way for the Taliban except to come back to the peace table. Therefore, we propose we should have cease-fire and the international community should put pressure on the Taliban to accept that,” he said.

The ambassador expects China to play a major role in the process. In mid-May, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a phone conversation with Hamdullah Mohib, national security advisor to the Afghan president, said that China is ready to facilitate internal negotiations among various parties in Afghanistan, including creating the conditions for negotiations in China.

The ambassador said that Afghanistan is willing to join any sincere initiative that will help facilitate peace in Afghanistan and the region.

“Afghanistan being a stable country is in favor of countries such as the US, China and India. It is more important how we and Pakistan can build trust and how China and India can build trust regarding Afghanistan regardless of other issues. It is about peace in the whole region,” said the ambassador.

By: Senator Rehman Malik

Afghan Peace

Afghanistan is advancing towards the stone ages with the unending conflict with no gain. The Afghan Taliban are picking up more strength and the march towards Kabul has started. A recently returned western diplomat from Kabul called on me who informed me that Kabul is under the grip of panic and rumours. According to him, Kabul is likely to be vacated by diplomats and other foreigners out of fear. This is very alarming and the world needs to halt further bloodshed of innocent Afghans. This could be stopped by the urgent initiative of world powers particularly the USA. I hope my views below may give some outline for immediate peace in Afghanistan. I am drawing the special attention of President Joe Biden who will consider my heartfelt points jolted below for his consideration of the non-ending killings of innocent Afghans in the unwarranted conflict.

Mr President, it is unfortunate that world powers including the US are having divergent views on agreeing to a one-point agenda which is nothing but “peace”, with no other option except peace. Your decision to withdraw the army is great but it will create a civil war if you withdraw troops without a pragmatic exit strategy to stop the civil war. This is a very important point for your consideration.

If the world powers do not converge on one point of bringing peace to Afghanistan, then I see the Taliban marching towards Kabul and every passing day becomes dangerous for the anti-Taliban/non-Taliban government and the Afghan society. The killing of innocent Afghans has started and if it continues there will be mass migrations of Afghan refugees to the neighbouring countries and we will witness another brand of the ‘Zaliman; creating trouble on a large level in the world.

It was very disappointing when I heard from the president of Afghanistan while giving an interview that “his death is

only one bullet away”. This statement coming from the sitting president of Afghanistan, attacks on schools, attacks on the Afghan Army via Herat and the killing of 100 of soldiers and the blood of innocent Afghans and the pain of injured children are unable to attract the attention of the leaders of the world powers.

I will explain why I used the term ‘hired-Taliban’ and how an engineered justification was planned to justify drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan and these operations are on record with many other facts which were misrepresented. I owe it to the nation to disclose some hidden and shocking aspects /factors behind some such incidents which you all will see in my coming book. I only remind the world powers to not allow the unaccountable killings of poor Afghans and let them not become victims to world politics.

The American Army is still in Afghanistan and the innocent people are still being butchered from both sides to play a power game at the cost of the lives of innocent Afghans. I have seen fears in the eyes of young poor children who will be victims of the post-withdrawal scenario. Rich Afghans/diplomats will fly away but the common man once again will be the victim of the Taliban. Pakistan must move with other friendly countries and bring a resolution for the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan apart from an Islamic Force—if it exists or will ever come into being as per my proposal—to be based in Saudi Arabia.

Let the Taliban and the present Afghan government be forced to sit at the table to work out a peace transition and formation of the government as per the wish of the people of Afghanistan. I know what is being thought in the capitals of the world power at the moment and world power frictions must come to end to bring peace in



war-torn Afghanistan.

I propose that let the Pentagon under President Joe Biden take the initiative to take solid steps for peace in Afghanistan and let us set objectives to determine the unrest and killing of innocent people as enemies of humanity and avoid another round of killings in Afghanistan by engaging China, Russia, the UK, the UAE, Pakistan, and Iran for the sake of the tired Afghans from this useless war of 30 years.

My country has made tremendous sacrifices for peace in Afghanistan and I am myself witness to this non-ending war. Since the US invasion of Afghanistan, more than 60,000 Pakistani civilians, security forces personnel, and women and children have been killed across the country apart from huge devastation to its economy and basic infrastructure. Pakistani economy suffered a total loss of \$126.79 billion due to the war on terror from 2001 to 2018. According to a Brown University study in 2019, the US had spent around \$978bn since 9/11, and US forces have suffered more than 2,300 deaths and around 20,660 soldiers injured in action. President Ghani said in 2019 that more than 45,000 members of the Afghan security forces had been killed since he became president five years earlier. And, according to the

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), nearly 111,000 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured since it began systematically recording civilian casualties in 2009. Pakistan has brought both the government and the Taliban on the table and it worked well and it is time for the US and the world to play a vital role in the restoration of peace in Afghanistan. So far, the world has failed as every effort for peace was signed with a longer timeline giving the latitude of time to anti-peace groups. President Joe Biden, you are the right president with the right tone, and you have the ability to bring real peace to Afghanistan. The present army chief, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, is fully determined to bring peace to Afghanistan. I am sure you would manage to bring peace with a proper strategy in collaboration with Pakistan. The region is looking towards you to use your influence to give peaceful Afghanistan to the world not with built but through your statesman skills. Mr. President! Convert this tragedy of Afghanistan into happiness and enable the Afghan future generation to live their lives their way and not under the fears of roaring guns. Let reality take over perception and let us admit that the Afghan war was a ... **P3**

As U.S. Pullout Nears, Groups with Seattle Ties That Work with Afghan Youth Face Uncertain Future

Marnie Gustavson lives and works in a tree-shaded Kabul compound near the site of a triple bombing two weeks ago that killed dozens of school girls.

Gustavson, a native of Western Washington, has spent the past 15 years in Afghanistan as executive director of PARSAs, which employs a largely Afghan staff in aid work focused on women and youth.

One of these employees lives in the neighborhood where the May 8 bombings took place, which includes many Hazara, a minority group of Shiites that have long been subject to prejudice and persecution. A few days after the carnage, she gave an anguished assessment of her family’s plight.

“Every day, when my children leave for school, they hug me and say they hope they will be back at noon,” the woman told Gustavson. “How can we live this way? How can I protect my children from this?”

This attack killed more than 80 and was one of the bloodiest in a year that has seen an upsurge of violence as U.S. troops pull out of the country by 9/11. After that date, Gustavson and her husband Norm plan to stay in Afghanistan, and continue PARSAs’ work.

“It’s hard. The situation changes day-to-day,” Gustavson said. “There’s very little way to predict what’s going to happen next.”

Another Afghanistan aid group with roots in the Puget Sound region, Seattle-based Sahar, also expects to maintain operations after the U.S. military exit.

Since 2001, Sahar — and its predecessor organization Ayni Education — have been involved in the renovation and construction of 25 schools for girls in northern Afghanistan’s Balkh Province. This spring, Sahar is halfway through fundraising for one of its most ambitious projects yet, building a \$1.5 million first-of-a kind public boarding school for girls in the province’s capital city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Ginna Brelsford, the group’s Seattle-based executive director, said that Sahar, which has long operated in low-key fashion outside the umbrella of U.S. military protection, is nimble enough to survive.

“We have had strategies planned for a very long time if the Taliban come back in full force, and scenarios for really everything in between,” Brelsford said.

The Taliban largely banned girls from schools in the 1990s when they ruled the country, and they have often ended schooling for girls over the age of 12 in areas now under their control.

“Thus far, the Taliban’s effect on girls’ education in areas under its control has ranged from total shutdown to negotiated agreements on which subjects are taught,”

according to a U.S. National Intelligence Council memorandum released this spring. The Taliban also have been accused by the U.S. and Afghan governments of killings that have claimed the lives of journalists, teachers, politicians and other civic leaders this year.

The Taliban deny involvement in many of the civilian attacks, including the May 8 bombings in Kabul that butchered the school-age girls.

Some analysts say this assault on Hazara youth has been the work of a splinter group aligned with the Islamic State group, which also has a presence in Afghanistan.

Regardless of who was responsible, Gustavson said the May 8 bombings stoked widespread anger among Kabul residents at the inability of both Taliban and the Afghan government to prevent such attacks.

All of this creates big concerns about what would happen if the Taliban succeed in their quest, either through an ongoing military offensive or negotiations, to once again become the nation’s dominant political power.

“One son says, ‘Come home, Mom,’ but it’s a natural response. My family is extraordinarily supportive,” said Gustavson, who this month returned to Port Orchard, and is currently visiting with her four adult children and mother.

WHO Renames...

protecting Asian Americans who have suffered a surge in attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic US anti-extremism groups say the number of attacks and hate crimes against Asian Americans has exploded since the beginning of the crisis.

They lay some of the blame with former President Donald Trump, who repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the “China virus”.

Months of deliberations

The choice of the Greek alphabet came after months of deliberations in which other possibilities such as Greek Gods and invented, pseudo-classical names were considered by experts, according to bacteriologist Mark Pallen who was involved in the talks.

But many were already brands, companies or alien names.

Another idea to refer to variants of concern as VOC1, VOC2 etc was scrapped after he pointed out it resembled an English swear word.

Historically, viruses have often been associated with the locations from which they are thought to have emerged such as Ebola which is named after the eponymous Congolese river.

But this can be damaging for the places and often inaccurate such as with the so-called “Spanish flu” pandemic of 1918 whose origins are unknown.

Before the new WHO scheme, some scientists had adopted their own simplified nomenclature for variants such as a February paper using bird names. However, it was criticised on the grounds that this could imperil birds and by the mother of a girl named Robin.

Fruit Farmers, Exporters Seek Market for Products

Investors said the import of fresh fruit from neighboring countries has affected the market for local products.

As the harvest season for fresh fruit arrives, farmers and exporters say they lack domestic markets and are limited in selling fruit abroad in a cost-effective way.

Security challenges and the influx of imported fruit, especially watermelon from Pakistan, have affected the local market for fruit and have kept the prices low, leaving farmers with no choice but to sell at prices so low they do not cover costs. One instance, according to farmers, is the watermelon yield in Farah, which faces the same fate every year. Last year, farmers threw their products on the roads as they were left unsold due to lower prices and no storage facilities in the province. The farmers and investors said they fear a similar fate for the watermelon this year, too.

When in season, seven kilograms of watermelon is sold for 50 Afs in Kabul markets (\$0.60), which farmers say is not enough to cover



the expenses on their farms.

One major setback for the fruit exporters has been the pause of the government-subsidized air routes, commonly known as air corridors. The operation of the air corridors was stopped in mid-March.

On May 14, officials said the air routes will soon become operational as President Ashraf Ghani has approved a proposal of the Ministry of Finance allocating 168 million Afs (over \$2 million) for the project.

"During the watermelon harvest season in Nangarhar, one truck

with watermelons is sent to Kabul while at the same time dozens of trucks are sent from Pakistan," said Mohammad Zahir, a fresh fruit exporter, referring to the impact of imported fresh fruit on local markets.

"In provinces where watermelons are grown, such as Farah, the farmers don't have an association through which they can collect watermelon and send it to the markets," said Suhrah, a fruit seller in Kabul.

The private sector said that the government needs to remove

hurdles in the way of trade and transit of Afghan fruits to other countries.

"Our transit problems with neighboring countries have remained unsolved. The problems in imports and exports have not been solved. The air corridor has faced hurdles due to COVID-19," said Khan Jan Alokozai, the deputy head of the Afghanistan Chambers Federation. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce did not comment on the matter despite requests from TOLONews.

Over 50% of...

she has finished high school and university in Herat and now wants to pursue a doctorate as well.

"Today's Afghanistan is not like the past. Today, women can achieve their dreams. The biggest dream for women is to become educated," Ozra said.

Ozra, who is a journalism student from Herat University, said she is now a lecturer at the university and is hopeful for a brighter future for Afghanistan.

"Women can improve if conditions if they fight for them. The conditions are there. Women cannot lose these opportunities and go back decades," she said.

Herat university has 5,500 girls who are studying in 71 departments. Figures show that the number of girls is more than boys in the university.

"Women have an active presence in our master's programs. 53 out of 213 women applicants found their way to a master's degree in this year's exam. Interest in education among Herat girls has increased compared to past years," said Abdullah Fayiz, head of the university.

The students said they go to the university every day with the hope of a better future for the country.

"Women make up half of society. They can go out of the home and work and be educated, same as men," said Zahra Rahmani, a journalism student.

"Women can never be calm when their rights are violated. All women and girls in Afghanistan want to be educated and want to work and support each other," said Elenaz Mohammadi, a journalism student at Herat University.

Figures provided by Herat University indicate that girls score higher in all subjects than boys.

Afghan...

useless exercise that created more terrorism than peace. Admitting a national mistake will make you look taller among world leaders.

The world wants peace in Afghanistan President Joe Biden, and you have the opportunity to win the hearts and minds of the Afghans in particular and the world in general by bringing peace there. I am sure you are not going to repeat firing the mother of the bombs on Afghanistan as the former US President Donald Trump did. Afghan has become a punching bag for many stakeholders and we hope it will end soon.

A highly rational and objective analysis would conclude that the US and its allies including former PM Tony Blair and many others would be regretting the launching of this so-called war

on terror in Afghanistan. Let us rectify our mistakes in our lifetime as we seniors will not be there in the world to narrate the hidden secrets and realities to the historian.

It is time to converge the world powers to one-point agenda of peace and this proposal may come in UN by yourself and let a delegation of Afghan Taliban be invited to White House as has previously be done by President Reagan when delegates were regarded high as they were to be used against USSR as per the war plan. These are the same Taliban and now fighting against the USA and the Afghan government. There is no harm to invite them to the White House in the presence of President Ashraf Ghani who also owes to the USA having been educated in the USA on American scholarship. Let this trilateral meeting take place in the White

House to resolve the Afghan issue once for all, and trust me Mr. President, your initiative to bring both the parties to the table in the White House will bring long-lasting peace in Afghanistan. This would be an honorable exit for the USA and everyone who remained associated with this war.

President Joe Biden is only one call away from all the above-mentioned leaders of the world power and your one call to every one of them will convince and converge on one page to stand with you to restore peace. I am sure the presidents of China and Russia will not say no to you and Pakistan is already working hard to get peace restored in Afghanistan in this peace process. Mr. President, please consider creating this forum of world powers for the sake of peace for the future generations of Afghanistan.

US To Continue...

During the meeting, Atmar spoke about the latest developments in the Afghan peace process, and the Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Kabul assured that his country would continue to cooperate in the peace talks. He

also spoke about the progress made in the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan began on May 1. This process is scheduled to be completed by September 11 this year.

On the other hand, Ross Wilson has given the invitation of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to Mohammad Hanif Atmar to attend the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Global Coalition. The meeting will be held in Italy next month.

Saudi Minister...

women driving while allowing gender-mixed attendance at music concerts and sporting events.

The relaxed social norms have been welcomed by many Saudis, two-thirds of whom are under 30, while riling ultra-conservatives.

The Saudi Arabia has clipped the powers of its religious police, who once elicited widespread fear, chasing men and women

out of malls to pray and berating anyone seen mingling with the opposite sex.

Prince Mohammed has promised a "moderate" Saudi Arabia as he attempts to break with its austere image, while simultaneously cracking down vigorously on dissent.

Over the past three years, the kingdom has arrested dozens of women activists, clerics, journalists as well as royal family members.

An unclassified US intelligence report concluded Prince Mohammed approved of and likely ordered the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post who wrote critically of the crown prince and his policies, was murdered by a team of Saudi agents in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. His dismembered body has never been recovered.

Exchange Rates

78.3	\$	78.4
94.9	€	95
108.7	£	109.8
497	Rp.	498
21	روپے	21.1
1045	₹	1055

Contact Numbers

Kabul Police - 119

Kabul Ambulance - 112

Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital

0202301360

Ata Turk Hospital

0202500312

Corona call center - 166



Aksos

اکسوس کتابپلورنٹی
Aksos Book Store



Add a Book
to
Your Life

Dehbori Crossroads in front of Park Kabul
0798 98 9696, 020 250 46 52
aksosbookstore@gmail.com
www.aksosbookstore.af
Aksos Book Store
Aksos Book Store



WAYGAL Printing Co.

If You Can Think It,
We Can Ink It.

OFFSET PRINTING

- Logo Design
- Business Card
- Books
- Letterheads
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- File Folders
- Brochure
- Flyers
- Calendars
- Posters
- other...

+93 (0) 704 734 984
+93 (0) 782 98 9696
+93 (0) 202512626
Dehbori Crossroads in Front of Park Kabul
waygalprinting.co@gmail.com

Heart of Asia

Chief Editor: M. Hamid Hamdard

Reporters: Safiullah Nasary, Shafiq Amirzay,

Jawad Temori & Hameedullah Hamidi

Graphic & Design: Arman

Phone: +93-202502100 - +93-777989696

Website: www.heartofasia.af

Email: heartofasiadaily@gmail.com

Address: Behind Rahman Baba High School

- Opposite to 3rd District,

Kabul - Afghanistan

Print: Waygal Printing .Co - +93 - 202512626

China Confirms World's First Human Case of Bird Flu

China reported the world's first human infection of the H10N3 bird flu strain on Tuesday but said the risk of it spreading widely among people was low.

A 41-year-old man was admitted to a hospital with fever symptoms in the eastern city of Zhenjiang on April 28 and was diagnosed with H10N3 a month later, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said in an online statement. "The risk of large-scale spread is extremely low," the NHC said, adding that the man was in a stable condition and his close contacts had reported no "abnormalities."

No information was provided about how the man contracted the illness.

It described H10N3 as low pathogenic -- less likely to cause death or severe illness -- in birds. The NHC said there had been no human cases of

H10N3 previously reported in the world. Several strains of bird flu have been found among animals in China but mass outbreaks in humans are rare.

The last human epidemic of bird flu in China occurred in late 2016 to 2017, with the H7N9 virus.

The H7N9 has infected 1,668 people and claimed 616 lives since 2013, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. Following recent avian flu outbreaks in Africa and Eurasia, the head of China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention last week urged stricter surveillance in poultry farms, markets and wild birds.

COVID-19 was first detected at a food and animal market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.



A look at the world

WHO Renames COVID-19 Variants With Greek Letters to Avoid Stigma

The UN health agency says one aim of the move is to avoid stigmatising the countries where coronavirus variants are first detected. Coronavirus variants are to be known by letters of the Greek alphabet to avoid misreporting and stigmatising nations where they were first detected, the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced. The new system applies to variants of concern -- the most troubling of which four are in circulation -- and the second-level variants of interest being tracked.

"While they have their advantages, these scientific names can be difficult to say and



recall, and are prone to misreporting," the WHO said in a statement.

"As a result, people often resort to calling variants by the places where they are detected, which is stigmatising and discriminatory."

The four coronavirus variants considered of concern by the United Nations agency and known generally by the public as the UK, South Africa, Brazil and India variants have now been given the letters Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta according to the order of their detection.

Other variants of interest continue down the alphabet.

"The labels don't replace existing scientific names, which convey important scientific information and will continue to be used in research," WHO's technical lead Maria Van Kerkhove tweeted.

"These labels will help with public discussion about VOC/VOI as the numbering system can be difficult to follow."

WHO in the statement said it encouraged media outlets and national authorities to adopt the new labels.

Earlier this month, US President Joe Biden signed a hate crimes law aimed at ... **P3**

Saudi Minister Defends Volume Limit on Mosque Loudspeakers



Saudi Arabia's Islamic affairs minister says the order was in response to citizens' complaints about the loud volume of mosque speakers. Saudi Arabia's Islamic affairs minister is defending a contentious order restricting the volume of mosque loudspeakers, saying it was prompted by complaints about excessive noise.

In a major policy last week in a country home to the holiest Muslim sites, the Islamic affairs ministry said the speakers should be set at no more than one-third of their maximum volume.

The order, which also limited the use of loudspeakers mainly to issue the call to prayer rather than broadcasting full sermons, triggered a conservative backlash on social media.

Islamic Affairs Minister Abdulatif al-Sheikh said on Monday the order was in response to citizens' complaints that the loud volume was disturbing children as well as the elderly. "Those who want to pray do not need to wait for... the imam's" call to prayer, al-Sheikh said in a video published by state television. "They should be at the mosque beforehand," he added.

Several television channels also broadcast prayers and Quran recitals, Sheikh said, suggesting the loudspeakers served a limited purpose.

In a country home to tens of thousands of mosques, many welcomed the move to reduce the decibel levels.

But the decision also stirred resentment on social media, with a hashtag calling for the banning of loud music in restaurants and cafes gaining traction.

Sheikh said criticism of the policy was being spread by "enemies of the kingdom" who "want to stir public opinion".

The policy follows de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's sweeping liberalisation drive, which has pushed a new era of openness in parallel with what observers call a de-emphasis on religion.

The young prince has eased social restrictions in the ultra-conservative kingdom, lifting decades-long bans on cinemas and ... **P3**

North Korea Creates New Role for 'Second-In-Command' to Kim Jong-Un

The 'first secretary' would preside over meetings on behalf of North Korea's leader. As per revised party rules, North Korea has created a position for a second-in-command after Kim Jong-un, close aides of the ruling party said.

On Tuesday, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the ruling Workers' Party in January decided to include a paragraph in the revised rules that mandates that the Central Committee elect the "first secretary -- who will be in charge after Mr Kim."

The agency reported that the position has been carved to lessen Mr Kim's "burden in managing party affairs." Interestingly, he held the title of first-secretary from 2012 to 2016.



The second-in-command will be able to preside over "key party meetings on behalf of the leader."

Sources close to the party said Jo Yong-won, who is a close aide of Mr Kim and a current standing member of the politburo has been elected to the post of the first secretary.

Mr Jo is considered one of Kim's closest aides, was seen by analysts at the time of the January meeting to hold the government's No. 3 position, after Kim and Choe Ryong Hae, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly.

Rachel Minyoung Lee, a fellow with 38 North, a US-based programme that monitors North Korea, told Reuters: "This seems to be the broader trend of North Korea delegating and redistributing some of Kim Jong-un's duties to others, not necessarily his powers, and streamlining the party leadership structure." Among other amendments to the party rules, North Korea also dropped the word "songun," or military-first policy, in the preamble of the revised party rules, local news reported. North Korea also deleted the expression that the party members "must actively fight to speed up the unification of the fatherland" as it elaborated on their duties, signalling a revamp of domestic politics.

Meanwhile, it was claimed by many that Mr Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, was serving as his "de facto second-in-command" but had not been given that title.



Shigal English Academy

AMERICAN ENGLISH FILE



Western Street of Kabul University Close to Dehbori Park.



+93 (0) 789 98 9696



shigal.edu@gmail.com



Shigal English Academy