



Leaving Afghanistan

The late head of Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, was fond of boasting...

World Bank Pledges Continued Support to Afghanistan



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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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Afghanistan, Poland Hold First Political Consultations Since 1993

Afghanistan and Poland held the first round of political consultations since 1993, the Afghan Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

According to the statement, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Mirwais Nab on Thursday met his Polish counterpart Marcin Przydacz in Warsaw, the capital of Poland.

The two counterparts discussed bilateral relations, peace process, the new chapter of partnership with Poland after withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, cooperation in the fields of economic, agricultural, banking, and education, as well as regional and...



Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan Signed by Islamic Scholars at Mecca

Diplomats and leading officials from Islamic organizations on Friday praised the historic "Declaration of peace in Afghanistan" conference for paving the way for a solution to the long-running crisis in the war-torn country.

The conference, hosted in Mecca on Thursday by the Muslim World League (MWL) under the auspices of Saudi Arabia, brought together for the first-time senior Afghan and Pakistani scholars, along with government ministers from the two countries, in an effort to help bring about reconciliation among the people of Afghanistan. The declaration was co-signed by the Minister for Religious Affairs Dr. Noorul Haq Qadri and Afghan Hajj, Guidance and Endowments Minister Mohammed Qasim Halimi.

The participants offered their support for negotiations between the warring factions in the country and rejected all acts of extremism. "This... P3

Kabul Explosions Kill 5; Casualties May Rise: MoI



Two blasts targeted minivans carrying civilians in two areas in the west of Kabul on Saturday afternoon, the Ministry of Interior Affairs said.

One of the blasts occurred in the Dasht-e-Barchi area in Kabul's District 13 and another happened after less than 30 minutes near Ali Jinnah Hospital in Kabul's District 6.

Violence has been rising as foreign forces withdraw from the country by Sept. 11 and efforts to broker a peace settlement between the Afghan government and insurgent Taliban have slowed.

It was not immediately clear who was behind Saturday's attacks. The ministry said that five people were killed in the two blasts and

that the casualties may rise. The blasts are similar to two explosions that happened in Kabul earlier this month, killing at least a dozen people, all civilians.

However, as the violence intensifies, following heavy clashes there are more areas in different provinces that fall to Taliban.

Salman Yusufi, the district governor

for Tolak in Ghor, said that at least 20 security force members were killed and 20 more were wounded in the clashes in the district.

He said that at least 10 security force members have been captured by the Taliban.

Yusufi did not confirm the fall of the district to the Taliban but criticized the lack of attention by relevant officials to supply equipment to the forces on the ground.

Local officials have not commented on the report.

This comes as the Defense Ministry said that civilian and military institutions in Zare district in the northern province of Balkh were shifted to another place on Saturday due to limited access to the district for supplying equipment to security forces.

Taliban has claimed to have captured the Zare district on Saturday morning.

In addition to the mentioned districts, so far, sources and officials have confirmed that the centers of at least 17 districts have fallen to militants over the last two months. According to two MPs, the centers of Ishkamish district in Takhar and Sozma Qala district in... P3

700,000 Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine Arrives in Kabul from China

The Ministry of Public Health announced that 700,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine arrived in Kabul from China on Thursday.

The ministry, however, did not specify when the vaccines would be given. Earlier, the Ministry of Public Health said that the implementation process had been suspended due to the lack of vaccines.

At least 968,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have already been provided to the Ministry of Public... P3



Ministry of Public Health Reports 973 New COVID-19 Cases

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) on Saturday reported 973 new positive cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the past 24 hours.

The ministry also reported 67 deaths in the last 24 hours and the death toll due to the virus in the country is now 3,527. Meanwhile, the ministry has resumed the COVID-19 vaccination drive across the country on Saturday. MoPH Spokesman Dastagir Nazari stated that vulnerable individuals, those over 55 years of age, and with chronic diseases will be prioritized. The MoPH stopped providing vaccines on June 7, as it ran out of COVID-19 vaccine doses.

The total number of positive cases now stand at 89,861. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs announced new directives



to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The directives include the temporary closure of all religious schools and institutions, and a halt in condolence ceremonies, religious studies within mosques, and large gatherings of clerics.

Additionally, the Ministry stated that prayers must be concise in an open space, observing social distancing and other health instructions.

Meanwhile, due to the deteriorating situation related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the consular section of the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul will remain closed for one week from June 13 to June 17. Further announcement would be made on Thursday (June 17). However, the Embassy would continue to be operational for online visas issuance facility.

UN Elects...

council are allocated by geographic region, with five replaced each year. The five newly elected countries represent Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. The Western Europe and other states group is not contesting any seats this year, as its two seats, currently held by Ireland and Norway, come up for election every other year. The Security Council is considered the most powerful body of the United Nations. The council, which is tasked to maintain international peace and security, can make legally binding decisions and has the power to impose sanctions and authorize the use of force.

Putin Says...

its spying capabilities. "It's just fake news. At the very least, I don't know anything about this kind of thing, those who are



speaking about it probably will know more about it. It's just nonsense, garbage," Putin said. The Washington Post reported Thursday that Moscow is preparing to give Iran a Kanopus-V satellite with a high-resolution camera, allowing the Islamic republic to monitor facilities of its adversaries across the Middle East.

By: Clifford D. May

Leaving Afghanistan

After Sept. 11, 2001, most Americans thought justice and prudence demanded sending troops to Afghanistan to oust the Taliban and extirpate its ally, Al-Qaeda, the organization that had carried out the most horrific terrorist attacks ever on U.S. soil.

That mission was swiftly accomplished. Or so it seemed. Leaders of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fled to neighboring Pakistan—a most unreliable American ally—and to the Islamic Republic of Iran—a most reliable American enemy. With patience and determination, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda began to plot their return to power.

In 2003, President George W. Bush's attention shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, where he toppled a tyrant without a plan for what would follow.

President Barack Obama thought himself wise for having opposed the intervention in Iraq. As for Afghanistan, he called it "the war that has to be won" on "the right battlefield." But after dispatching Osama bin Laden in 2011, he declared, incorrectly, that only "remnants" of Al-Qaeda remained.

Former President Donald Trump promised the Taliban that all U.S. troops would be withdrawn by May 1, 2021, in exchange for Taliban promises—such as breaking with Al-Qaeda—that were not remotely believable.

President Joe Biden extended the timeline to Sept. 11, 2021. U.S. defense officials are now said to be withdrawing ahead of schedule, which means there's not much time left to mitigate the negative consequences of this historic capitulation to terrorists.

The odds that the Afghan government will survive without American air support, intelligence, training and other assistance are not good. A report issued last Thursday by a team of counterterrorism experts working for the U.N. Security Council finds that the Taliban are "contesting or controlling up to 70 percent of territory outside of urban areas," and massing "their forces around key cities and towns," ready to strike when "departing foreign troops are no longer able to effectively

respond." This is consistent with the research and reporting of my colleague, Bill Roggio, at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy's (FDD) Long War Journal.

The U.N. report also finds that the relationship between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda "has grown deeper as a consequence of personal bonds of marriage and shared partnership in struggle, now cemented through second-generational ties."

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster served as Trump's national security adviser in 2017-18. Leon Panetta served as Obama's CIA director and then as secretary of defense. Last week, they discussed what went wrong in Afghanistan and what's still possible to salvage with Bradley Bowman, senior director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, a West Point graduate who deployed to Afghanistan as a U.S. Army staff officer.

It's worth listening to their conversation in its entirety (a recording and transcript are available online), but I'll highlight a few key points here.

McMaster said the conflict in Afghanistan has not really been a 20-year war, but rather "a one-year war fought 20 times over. The inconsistency of effort is astounding over that period of time."

Panetta said it was a serious mistake for the United States to hold talks with the Taliban and not insist that a representative of the Afghan government have a seat at the table. If the Taliban wouldn't talk with the government while we had forces in Afghanistan, why would they do so after we'd bugged out? It also should have been obvious, he said, that continuing military pressure was necessary to force the Taliban to make concessions. McMaster said he was puzzled by how many Americans, on both the left and right, have fallen for the delusion "that wars end when we leave—as if the Taliban will look around: 'Hey, the Americans are gone. Let's just stop fighting!'" Tests of that theory include Iraq, from which all U.S. troops were withdrawn in 2011, after which



"then-Vice President Biden called up President Obama on the phone and said, 'Thank you for allowing me to end this goddamn war!'"

McMaster summarized what followed: "Al-Qaeda in Iraq didn't stop and, in fact, morphed into the most destructive terrorist organization in history, ISIS, an organization ... that by 2014 was in control of territory the size of Britain." Panetta emphasized that while Biden "inherited a legacy of failure" in Afghanistan, he should have made clear—and still could—"that we are not pulling away from Afghanistan in our responsibility to try to help Afghanistan in terms of its government, to provide aid to the Afghans, and also to be able militarily to conduct counterterrorism operations to go after targets in Afghanistan as well."

He pointed out that if the Taliban take over, with Al-Qaeda under their wing, and with ISIS established in the country as well, there will be "a base of operations for terrorism, again, in

Afghanistan. We cannot allow that to happen because all that needs to happen is one attack in this country as a result of that, and there is no question, we are going to be back at war in Afghanistan."

Another downside to the current pace of withdrawal: Abandoning those who have struggled alongside us, in particular Afghan translators, who now risk execution for allying with Americans. "I think that sends a terrible message to our allies around the world in terms of whether or not they can trust the United States," said Panetta. "Protect the progress that's been made," he emphatically advised. "Don't let that go to hell!"

Failing that, history will record that Biden helped fulfill Khalid Sheikh Mohammad's prediction. "We will win," the captured Al-Qaeda mastermind of the 9/11 attacks told his interrogators years ago. "We only need to fight long enough for you to defeat yourself by quitting."

By: Shashi Tharoor

Pakistan's Taliban Monster

The late head of Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, was fond of boasting that when Afghanistan's history came to be written, it would record that the ISI, with the help of America, defeated the Soviet Union. And next, he would stily add, historians would state that the ISI, with the help of America, defeated America.

Gul's boast was not the sort of empty rodomontade that military men are notorious for once they hang up their uniforms and recall their past as being more glorious than the details might warrant. He was right to argue that it was the ISI's tactic of sponsoring militants and terrorists — amply armed, supplied and financed by the United States — against the Red Army in Afghanistan that forced the Kremlin to withdraw ignominiously.

Subsequently, using the same approach and initially many of the same personnel and methods, Pakistan created and sponsored a mujahideen group calling themselves the Taliban, or "students" of Islam, who swiftly took over Afghanistan and ruled it as a wholly owned ISI subsidiary.

Things were rosy for Gul and his ilk until Osama bin Laden, a former mujahideen fighter who enjoyed the hospitality of the Taliban's new Islamic Emirate, ordered the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the U.S. from his Afghan hideout.

America's furious response resulted in the overthrow of the Taliban and the exile of bin Laden, under ISI protection, to refuge in a Pakistani military redoubt. The ISI had even less to crow about when U.S. tracked down bin Laden to a secure compound in Abbottabad

and special forces killed him there in 2011.

But as America wearied of being bogged down interminably in Afghanistan, and the ISI helped its Taliban clients to rearm, reorganize and resume their operations against the U.S.-backed regime in Kabul, the tide turned in the ISI's favor. President Joe Biden has announced that U.S. forces will withdraw completely from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The date that long symbolized America's determination to strike at the root of the terrorist attacks against it now signifies its lack of will to continue.

Whatever face-saving successor arrangements the U.S. may put in place to mask its capitulation, its withdrawal from Afghanistan, with none of its long-term objectives achieved, is a defeat.



With the Taliban more powerful than ever and poised to reclaim power in Kabul, the only external victor will be the ISI. As Gul foresaw, it will have defeated America with America's help. Pakistan has now received two decades' worth of U.S. military assistance, totaling an estimated \$11

billion. The ISI has long been obsessed with the idea that controlling Afghanistan would give Pakistan the "strategic depth" needed to challenge its main adversary, India. A Taliban regime (or even a Taliban-dominated coalition government) in Kabul is... **P3**

World Bank Pledges Continued Support to Afghanistan

World Bank Vice President for the South Asia Region, Hartwig Schafer, in meetings with President Ashraf Ghani and the acting finance minister in the last three days has pledged to continue its assistance to Afghanistan within the framework of the commitments made in last year's Geneva conference.

According to the World Bank officials, in the discussions, the Afghan side committed to expedite efforts for reforms in the areas of services and development of private sector.

World Bank has suggested the Afghan government encourage the private sector to expand its activities and make the necessary plans to attract foreign investments to help protect

the achievements of the Afghan people.

The organization has also called on the donor nations to continue their support to Afghanistan for another four years in the structure of Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

Analysts said that World Bank's continued support to Afghanistan's financial sector is a key to fix the country's economic situation.

"The government needs to bring necessary reforms in various sectors because this can build mutual trust between the government and the international community, especially the World Bank," said economist Sayed Massoud.



"Schafer emphasized the Bank's continued commitment to supporting COVID-19 recovery and progress toward a more resilient and peaceful future for the country," said the statement.

He also reviewed with international

partners the commitments made at the Afghanistan Pledging Conference in 2020 and emphasized the need to support the Afghan government to accelerate reforms, strengthen the private sector, and maintain the delivery of public services.

Kabul...

Sar-e-Pul fell to the Taliban on Thursday.

The centers of Burka district in Baghlan, Narkh, and Jalrez districts in Maidan Wardak, Dawlat Shah district in Laghman, Qaisar district in Faryab, Shahrak district in Ghor, and Shirzad district in Uruzgan have fallen to the Taliban in less than two months.

The Taliban claims they have also captured Charkh district in Logar, Do Ab, and Mandol districts in Nuristan, Farsi district in Herat, Deh Yak district in Ghazni, Gezab district in Daikundi, and Shinkai district in Zabul.

Declaration...

historic announcement reflects the great efforts made by the Kingdom (of Saudi Arabia), as the current president of the Islamic Summit, and its pivotal role in reconciliation among the parties in the Islamic countries," said Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimeen, secretary-general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). He added that he values the work of the MWL that led to Thursday's declaration and an agreement to find a lasting and comprehensive solution that will support the process of peace, reconciliation, stability, progress and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Sayed Jalal Karim, the former Afghan ambassador to Saudi Arabia, told Arab News, "The peace conference was very fruitful for peace and stability in Afghanistan. It came at a very good time that will help to further strengthen relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan."

700,000 Doses of...

Health. India has donated 500,000 doses of these vaccines and another 486,000 doses came through the World Health Organization through the COVAX program.

The vaccines were handed over yesterday by the Chinese Ambassador for Afghanistan to Afghan President in Arg.

Afghanistan...

international cooperation, the statement said.

Mirwais Nab expressed his gratitude to the Polish Government for "its investment in blood and treasure over the past 20 years," the statement said.

He also paid tribute to the 44 Polish soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan.

Stressing the importance of further strengthening the bilateral ties between the two countries, Nab hoped that the new chapter of partnership opened new horizons of collaboration with Afghanistan's partners, especially with Poland.

Meanwhile, Deputy Foreign

Minister of Poland Marcin Przydacz has voiced Poland's support for Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO allied forces.

Przydacz noted that since 2002 Poland has supported Afghanistan with the military presence of its troops and contributed nearly 30 million EUR towards the development of Afghanistan and its society. "He declared his country's readiness to continue its support for peace, stability, and prosperity of Afghanistan," the statement said.

He added that Poland hoped for maintaining a lasting peace and Afghanistan's achievements built during the last 20 years, including in the field of human rights,

especially the rights of women and religious minorities.

Afghan Ambassador to Warsaw Tahir Qadir; Ambassador Hamid Sediq, senior advisor to the MFA; Witold Sobków, Director General of the Asia-Pacific Department, MFA Poland; and Polish Ambassador to Afghanistan Adam Burakowski also attended the political consultations.

Direct diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Poland were established during Ghazi King Amanullah Khan's reign in 1927.

Both countries have been enjoying close ties ever since. Poland has been a solid partner in the security and infrastructure fields since 2001.

Pakistan's...

the best guarantee of that.

The Taliban factions are so beholden to their Pakistani benefactors that, as Afghan President Ashraf Ghani acidly remarked, their decision-making bodies — Quetta Shura, Miramshah Shura and Peshawar Shura — are named after the Pakistani towns where they are based.

But Gul's successors would be wise to tone down their celebrations. First, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan removes a vital source of leverage for Pakistan in Washington. It may not be good news for Pakistan if the Americans need it less.

Furthermore, as the ISI knows, the problem with creating and sponsoring militant groups is that they do not always remain under your control. The lesson of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein — that the creatures we give life to can develop minds and needs of their own — has been apparent elsewhere as well, not least in Israel's role in building up Hamas as a rival to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The same thing has happened

in Pakistan, where the period of sullen cooperation between the Pakistani authorities and the U.S. during the post-9/11 American crackdown in Afghanistan spawned the rebellion of the "Pakistani Taliban."

While the Afghan Taliban needed Pakistani refuge, ISI safe houses, funding and arms to mount the insurgency that has brought the U.S. to the point of withdrawal, the Pakistani Taliban have attacked their own erstwhile godfathers for insufficient fealty to militant Islam.

The ISI no doubt hopes that once U.S. forces are gone and the Afghan Taliban is securely entrenched in Kabul, it can persuade the Pakistani Taliban to forgo and forget the agency's previous transgressions. If that happens, the thinking goes, peace will be restored, the ISI will control Afghanistan and the Pakistani mujahideen will stop targeting Pakistani Army installations and convoys — and join the ISI in intensifying attacks on the "real enemy," India.

But a nightmarish alternative scenario for the ISI is also possible. Pakistani militant

groups, emboldened by the success of their brethren in Afghanistan, might no longer be prey to the military's blandishments. Instead, they could launch terror attacks with the aim of emulating in Pakistan what the Taliban have achieved in Afghanistan.

If Afghanistan can be run as an Islamic emirate, they may ask, why can't we do the same in Pakistan? Why dance to the ISI's tune when we can call our own?

In such a scenario, the ISI's heady moment of triumph on 9/11 this year could seem increasingly hollow, as the vipers it has nurtured strike at its own breast. True, the Pakistani Taliban — without a state sponsor of their own — has less chance of success than their Afghan counterparts. But they can still do considerable damage, in the process intensifying the Pakistani public's disenchantment with the military's domination of their country.

Should that happen, we will need to extend Gul's account and say that the ISI, as the agent of the Pakistani military, helped to "defeat" or at least discredit itself.

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UN Elects Five Members to Serve on the Security Council

Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were elected non-permanent members of the UN Security Council on Friday for a two-year term.

The newly elected members will take up their new responsibilities on Jan. 1, 2022, and will serve till Dec. 31, 2023.

All five candidates were running unopposed on Friday. They will replace the outgoing non-permanent members of Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, and Vietnam.

A candidate must obtain the support of two-thirds of the member states present and voting at the General Assembly session in order to secure a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, regardless of whether the candidate is

contested or not. This means that a minimum of 129 positive votes are required to win a seat if all 193 UN member states are present and voting.

In Friday's voting, Ghana won 185 votes, Gabon 183 votes, Brazil 181 votes, the UAE 179 votes, and Albania 175 votes, according to results announced by Volkan Bozkir, the current General Assembly president.

Among the five newly elected members, Albania is the only country that has never served on the Security Council. Brazil has served 10 times.

The Security Council has 15 members, five of which are permanent ones: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States. The 10 non-permanent seats of the... **P2**



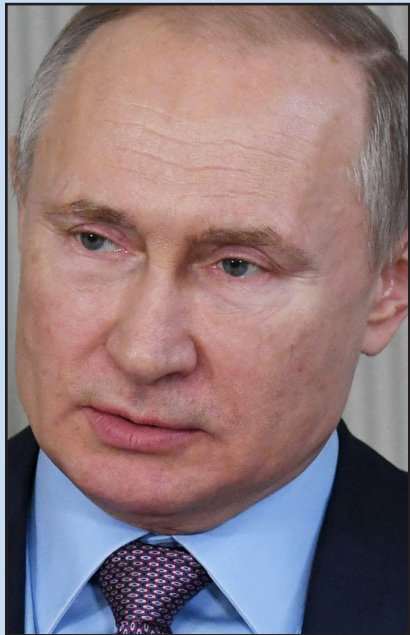
A look at the world

Putin Says Relations with U.S. At Lowest Point in Years

U.S.-Russia relations are at their lowest ebb in recent years, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during an interview with NBC News ahead of his meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden next week.

"We have a bilateral relationship that has deteriorated to its lowest point in recent years," Putin said, according to an NBC translation of the interview broadcast on Friday.

Putin and Biden will meet in Geneva on Wednesday.



In the interview, Putin praised former President Donald Trump as "an extraordinary individual, talented individual," and said Biden, as a career politician, was "radically different" from Trump.

Asked about Biden calling him a killer in an interview in March, Putin said he had heard dozens of such accusations. "This is not something I worry about in the least," Putin said.

Such discourse "is part of U.S. political culture where it's considered normal. By the way, not here, it is not considered normal here," Putin said.

Putin in Friday's interview denied a U.S. media report that claimed Russia was set to deliver an advanced satellite system to Iran that will vastly improve... **P2**

Iran Sends Naval Fleet to Atlantic Ocean for First Time



Deputy Chief of Iran's Army for Coordination announced that an Iranian naval fleet, comprising Sahand destroyer and Makran ship has left Iran for the Atlantic Ocean for the first time without mooring in other countries' ports.

We consider presence in international waters as the inalienable right of the Navy of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and we will continue this path with authority, said Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari on Thursday.

"The 77th strategic naval fleet of the Navy, comprising of the 'Sahand' destroyer and the 'Makran' ship, is present in the Atlantic Ocean for the first time to demonstrate the capabilities of Iran in the maritime arena," he added.

"The fleet departed from Bandar Abbas on May 10 and after a long journey after thirty days of navigation and crossing the Cape of Good Hope, traveling 6,000 nautical miles (nearly 12,000 kilometers), is currently in the Atlantic Ocean," Sayyari said. "The fleet continues on its longest naval mission to the North Atlantic."

Stating that the presence of the Iranian naval fleets on the high seas is done under international maritime law, saying, "Iranian naval fleet, comprising the 'Sahand' destroyer and 'Makran ship' has left Iran for the Atlantic Ocean for the first time without mooring in other countries' ports and this powerful presence indicates the naval capability and authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

He went on to say that the mission of the strategic navy of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to defend the water borders and protect the resources and interests of the country at the seas

Over 845m COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Administered Across China

Over 845.2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered across China as of Thursday, the National Health Commission (NHC) said Friday. Also on Friday, a health official with the NHC said at a press conference that a total of 622 million people had been vaccinated in China by Thursday. Meanwhile, The global death toll from the coronavirus has reached 3.78



million, while the overall number of confirmed cases is around 175 million, according to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

The list of the most affected countries includes the US, India, and Brazil. In the United States, over 33.4 million cases have been confirmed so far, and the death toll from the virus has reached 599,000.

It is followed by India, which witnessed a terrifying spike in cases in May, with a total of 29 million COVID-19 infected and over 363,000 deaths. At the same time, Brazil has confirmed around 17.3 million cases and the second-highest death toll in the world of around 484,000.



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