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Heart of Asia

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Afghan, Turkish, Iranian Ministers Agree to Enhance Cooperation

Foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Turkey and Iran in a trilateral meeting in Antalya reaffirmed a commitment to "solidarity and cooperation" based on "deep-rooted historical, religious and cultural commonalities and shared values," the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Mohammad Haneef Atmar, Javad Zarif and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu held the meeting on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

They underlined their commitment to further expand cooperation particularly in the areas that would contribute to economic progress and sustainable development.... **P3**



More Districts Collapse to Taliban

More reports came in on Sunday of districts collapsing to the Taliban. Local sources in Balkh province confirmed the fall of Charbolak district to the Taliban.

According to these sources who spoke to Hashte Sobh daily, the Taliban launched a series of offensive attacks to oust the district on Saturday night, and at 9am on Sunday, Taliban took full control of the district.

A security source, who did not want to be named, told the daily, that the district had been captured by the Taliban after heavy fighting and dozens of Afghan troops had surrendered to the Taliban. Meanwhile, Abdullah Masroor, deputy head of the Balkh provincial council, said that the district had fallen to the Taliban after heavy fighting, but did not provide further details.

Meanwhile, local sources in Takhar province also told Hashte Sobh daily that after the fall of Baharak district, five other districts in the province have fallen to the Taliban. Takhar Provincial Council head Wafiullah Rahmani told the daily on Sunday that Bangi, Chal, Hazar Smach, Yangi Qala... **P2**

Karzai Says US Failed In Afghanistan



Kabul: Afghanistan's former president Hamid Karzai in an explosive interview to AP on Sunday said that the United States came to Afghanistan to fight extremism and bring stability to his war-tortured nation and is leaving nearly 20 years later, having failed at

both. Karzai's remark comes just weeks before the last US and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, ending their forever war. Karzai said extremism is at its "highest point" and the departing troops are leaving behind a disaster. "The

international community came here 20 years ago with this clear objective of fighting extremism and bringing stability... but extremism is at the highest point today. So, they have failed," he said. Their legacy is a war-ravaged nation in "total disgrace

and disaster", he said. Still, Karzai, who had a conflicted relationship with the United States during his 13-year rule, wanted the troops to leave, saying Afghans were united behind an overwhelming desire for peace and needed now to take responsibility for their future.

"We will be better off without their military presence," he said. "I think we should defend our own country and look after our own lives. Their presence (has given us) what we have now. We don't want to continue with this misery and indignity that we are facing. It is better for Afghanistan that they leave," he added.

In April, when President Joe Biden announced the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 troops, he said America was leaving having achieved its goals. Al-Qaeda had been greatly diminished and bin Laden was dead. America no longer needed boots on the ground to fight the terrorist threats that might emanate from Afghanistan, he said.

Pres Biden Invites Pres Ghani, HCNR Abdullah to White House on 25 June

President Biden looks forward to welcoming Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, to the White House on June 25, 2021. The visit by President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Afghanistan as the military drawdown continues. The United States is committed to supporting the Afghan people by providing diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian assistance to support the Afghan people, including Afghan women, girls and... **P3**



About 6.5 Million Afghans Are Refugees Across the Globe

On World Refugee Day (June 20), the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations of Afghanistan estimates that some 6.5 million Afghans are living as migrants or asylum seekers in about 70 countries.

Iran and Pakistan host the largest number of Afghan refugees. More than four million more Afghans, have been forced to flee their homes and areas as a result of fighting and escalating violence. The Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations said that there are about four million internally displaced people in Afghanistan, and since the beginning of the solar year 1,400, about 128,800 people have been displaced from their original areas.

Although according to the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations, aid is being provided to Internally Displaced



Persons (IDPs), in most parts of Afghanistan, IDPs are complaining about the lack of timely and timely assistance, leading the government to underemployment and lack of planning.

It is feared that with the escalation of violence in Afghanistan, not only will the number of those forced to flee the country increase, but also the number of internally displaced

persons. Currently, there are 2,215,445 registered refugees from Afghanistan living in Iran and Pakistan. Only a little number of refugees (1,072) have returned to the country in 2021, according to the United Nations (UN) data. Even the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has expressed concern... **P2**

More Districts...

and Namak Ab districts had fallen to the Taliban since Saturday.

According to Rahmani, the districts collapsed after fierce clashes between security forces and the Taliban. According to the head of the Takhar Provincial Council, Mawlawi Zahir, the district police chief, was killed along with four others in a clash between security forces and the Taliban in the Namak Ab district of the province. The district is now under the control of the Taliban. Baharak district of Takhar fell to the Taliban on Saturday. Local officials in Takhar and the Ministries of Interior and National Defense have so far said nothing about the fall of Takhar districts.

About 6.5...

over the plight of Afghan refugees in countries and refugee camps around the world, and called on migrant organizations to pay special attention to the plight of these refugees.

A statement from the Independent Human Rights Commission (IHRC) released on Sunday, on the occasion of World Refugee Day, said that the escalation of the war and the country's volatile security situation have led to increased civilian casualties, displacement, displacement and more migration from Afghanistan.

According to the commission, large numbers of Afghan refugees in countries and refugee camps around the world have been left without legal action for years. Therefore, the AIHRC has called on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other relevant agencies to pay special attention to the plight of Afghan refugees in countries and refugee camps.

By: ELLEN MITCHELL

Biden Struggles to Detail Post-Withdrawal Afghanistan Plans

The Biden administration is struggling to articulate how it will keep Afghanistan from falling to the Taliban after American forces depart, even as the U.S. is more than halfway through its troop withdrawal.

The Pentagon's top brass have insisted the U.S. military will conduct operations launched from outside the country if needed, but they've offered few details on logistics like where those troops would be based.

The lack of specifics came into focus Friday when the Afghan government's chief peace envoy warned that the Taliban will not have an interest in reaching a peace agreement with Kabul after American and NATO forces depart. Afghanistan's National Reconciliation Council head Abdullah Abdullah told The Associated Press that withdrawal "will have an impact on the negotiation with the Taliban."

He said Taliban leaders "may find themselves further emboldened and they may think -- some of them at least -- that with the withdrawal, they can take advantage of the situation militarily."

The remarks come amid reports that the Taliban is quickly reclaiming territory they had lost during the 20-year conflict, putting more pressure on the Biden administration to spell out how it plans to provide support to Afghanistan's government after all U.S. troops exit the country by September.

During a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing Thursday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said there was a "medium" risk that an extremist group like al-Qaeda could regenerate in Afghanistan just two years after U.S. forces leave the country.

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Army Gen. Mark Milley, who also testified at the hearing, backed up Austin's claims, adding that "if certain

other things happen, if there was a collapse of the government or dissolution of the Afghan security force, that risk would obviously increase."

The United States has been in Afghanistan since 2001, invading the country following the 9/11 terror attacks by al-Qaeda. The militant group planned and carried out the attack from Afghanistan, where it had been given safe haven by the Taliban. Coalition troops have been there ever since to prevent similar terrorist attacks on the U.S. or its allies.

But President Biden in April said the roughly 2,500 remaining U.S. forces will withdraw from the country by Sept. 11, as will the approximately 7,000 NATO troops. Though Biden has given a general outline of the plan, specifics have remained few and far between.

While in Brussels for his first NATO summit this week, Biden was repeatedly questioned on plans to bolster the Afghan government after U.S. troops leave. He declined, however, to provide specifics on securing critical infrastructure such as embassies and airports or how to ensure the Taliban doesn't once again place strict rules on girls and women.

"Our troops are coming home, but we agreed that our diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian commitment to the Afghan people and our support for," Biden said Monday after meeting with other NATO officials.

Some lawmakers say they fear that with no solid plan in place, the U.S. is creating a recipe for disaster, especially amid reports of fighting in 80 of the roughly 400 districts.

"I'm very concerned that Afghanistan is going to fall to the Taliban and that we once again will see the imposition of Sharia law and that girls and women will not be allowed to pursue an education or participate fully in society," Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) told Milley



on Thursday.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) later followed up, questioning whether the United States was working with international partners to protect vulnerable populations once American troops leave.

"Realistically, if we're not there, we're going to have very limited impact on the protection of those that are still in Afghanistan," Milley replied.

Also tied up in those concerns is increasing alarm over the fate of Afghans who helped U.S. troops during the war.

Lawmakers this past week repeatedly warned that the Biden administration must act with more urgency to grant visas to those Afghans and evacuate them before the withdrawal is complete, as they risk being executed by the Taliban for working with U.S. forces.

"If he doesn't act, and he doesn't get these people out, blood will be on his hands and on his administration's hands," Rep. Michael Waltz (R-Fla.), a former Green Beret, said of Biden at a news conference Wednesday. "The time for talk, the time for debate

is over."

A day earlier, Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) said the White House should have its "hair on fire" over the issue.

The Pentagon has maintained it is prepared to help Afghans in any way, but stressed it is the State Department, not the Defense Department, that is in charge of processing visas.

Milley on Thursday sought to alleviate concerns, emphasizing that while there are many other outcomes that are possible for Afghanistan the military will "work to try to have those outcomes achieved as opposed to the worst case outcome."

"It's the president's intent to keep an embassy open, to keep our security forces around the embassy and to continue to work with the Afghan government to continue to fund the Afghan security forces and to keep that situation from devolving into the worst case and that's what we're planning on and that's what we're working toward," he said.

"There are no guarantees in any of this."

Interview: Anadolu Agency

Our Regional Countries Don't Want Talibanization of their country

Anadolu Agency: What do you think about Turkey's role in ensuring the security of the Kabul International Airport while also mending ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan at this crucial moment in time?

Abdullah Abdullah: What we are talking at the moment about the Kabul International Airport is: The United States, after start of the withdrawal of its troops as well as NATO troops, it started its discussions with the Turkish government at different levels, and negotiations on what to do about the Kabul International Airport and its security.

It was raised also with the government of Pakistan, which had shown its consent with that issue. But meanwhile, the details of it has not been discussed between the government of Pakistan and Turkish government.

And, personally, as a citizen of that country, I think, that's important if Turkey place (itself) there (at the Kabul International Airport).

Anadolu Agency: What is the way forward to revitalize the Istanbul peace talks? What do you expect from Turkey in this regard?

Abdullah Abdullah: Unfortunately, they (Taliban) have not agreed with that. They have put conditions that are not viable and not rational for the Istanbul conference.

That would have been another opportunity to boost and re-energize the peace process, or the negotiations, which at the moment is moving forward very slowly, with a very slow pace.

But due to the Taliban's position that has not happened. Different countries in the world were involved in this. The United Nations wanted this to happen. And Turkey worked

together with Qatar, which is the host country for the negotiations in Taliban out there. They have an office there. Meanwhile, the negotiations started in September last year in Qatar. Qatar was also working together with Turkey but unfortunately due to that position of Taliban, negotiations, or the meeting has not taken place.

Anadolu Agency: Afghanistan is witnessing a surge in Taliban attacks, particularly after the announcement of the withdrawal of foreign troops. What is your government's strategy to cope with this in the wake of the withdrawal of foreign troops?

Abdullah Abdullah: Taliban have tried to take advantage of the relative vacuum that the absence of the international troops or departure of the international troops has left behind. The Taliban

tried to take advantage of that attacks, and make some gains. But I'm sure that those gains are temporary.

The people suffered as a result of that. And there have been a lot of casualties as well on both sides and also for the civilians in those areas. If that's part of a strategy for the negotiation table, that will not happen. Or if that's part of the thinking that they could have a military solution, that also will not work. So hopefully they will revisit their decision in that regard, and return back to the negotiating table and take negotiations seriously rather than increasing the level of violence. Anadolu Agency: Is there any possibility for Russia, China, or any other major powers to take advantage and increase their influence in Afghanistan by taking advantage of the power vacuum following the foreign troops' withdrawal?

Abdullah Abdullah: I would say that countries of the neighborhood, and

also the wider region, which you mentioned, Russian Federation and China, have their own concerns as well about the situation in Afghanistan. Some of the terrorist groups, which are working very closely together with the Taliban, are a threat for those countries.

And there were countries which are not happy with the presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan. But at the same time, they don't want Afghanistan to go back to the old days, or they don't want Talibanization of their country. And they see that as a potential threat for their own security.

So that gives us the sense that, from this point onward, there needs to be more collaboration, more cooperation between different countries, rather than looking at it from the angle of competing interest.

Anadolu Agency: Do you have hopes associated with the Doha talks or other initiatives?

Abdullah Abdullah: When... **P3**

3 Imported Electricity Pylons Damaged in Samangan

Breshna Company has announced that three imported electricity pylons in Samangan province have been damaged by a mine explosion.

According to Breshna Company, these pylons were blown up at 10pm on Friday in Qachindara area of Samangan province. Breshna technical staff have been dispatched to the site to repair them and are expected to begin repair work in the next few hours.

Breshna said that the demolition of pylons in the last two months has disrupted electricity in most provinces and has led to huge financial losses for Breshna. The company has asked the people and the security forces to help identify the perpetrators of the explosions and prevent them.

In the past few months, most power stations in northern Kabul have been destroyed. Meanwhile, the Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs Mohammad Talib Qasim Halimi has announced that the Taliban are destroying public facilities by taking control of some areas in the country for several days. He said that the Taliban had no purpose other than to destroy public facilities, explode and commit suicide. The Minister added, "It is just a building and it does not belong

to any religion. There is no infidel infrastructure, but we see that the Taliban are destroying it."

According to Halimi, they would not have destroyed public facilities if the Taliban had worked to build a system and establish a just government that would benefit Afghanistan. Halimi added that the Taliban were destroying bridges, power stations, buildings and other public facilities in areas they controlled for several days.

Halimi stated that the scholars of the Islamic world, Islamic organizations and more than ten other countries have declared the war in Afghanistan illegal and forbidden. He said that at a recent meeting in Saudi Arabia, scholars from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan called the war in Afghanistan detrimental to Islam.

Halimi added that Pakistani clerics who had previously issued fatwas against the Afghan government told the Mecca conference that the war in Afghanistan was illegal and that Afghanistan's insecurity was Pakistan's insecurity. According to him, religious scholars from the three countries said that there was no excuse for jihad or war in Afghanistan and that the opposition to the Afghan government should



resolve the problem through negotiations and understanding. Meanwhile, residents of Badghis province and their representatives in the Provincial Council and the National Assembly took up arms in support of security forces and the protection of government facilities. Residents of Badghis said that they will join the security forces in fighting the Taliban, if needed.

Some civil society activists and members of the Badghis Provincial Council are optimistic about the formation of a "second resistance" front to provide security, calling the structure spontaneous and popular. Seyed Mahmoud Entezar, a civil activist in Badghis, said that on Saturday, residents of

Badghis and some members of the provincial council and the House of Representatives held an armed maneuver in Qala-e-Naw, the capital of Badghis province, expressing their support for security forces.

He asserts that the "second resistance" group is fighting alongside security forces against the Taliban and defending government facilities and government territory. The head of Badghis Provincial Council called for the support of the local administration of the province for the formation of the Second People's Resistance Front and stressed that they need the government's cooperation in providing combat equipment to fight the Taliban.

Afghan, Turkish...

The three foreign ministers expressed their "willingness to enhance their cooperation on regional connectivity in the fields of transport, trade, energy and infrastructure," and agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

They also underlined the "importance of further strengthening cooperation in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in all their forms and manifestations, transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and their precursors, and arms, human trafficking, crimes against cultural and historical heritage, cybercrimes and illegal migration," the ministry statement said. They expressed their determination to increase cooperation in "people-to-people contacts, education, social and cultural exchange and tourism."

The ministers recognized the importance of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) as a substantial platform that contributes to regional stability in fields ranging from political and security cooperation to economic integration.

Three major...

POLITICAL CONCERNS
With Washington's abrupt withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, commonly known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the re-imposition and intensification of sanctions against Iran, the United States challenged all parties to the deal, but it was Iran that suffered the most from the unilateral move. The ongoing negotiations among the representatives of Iran and those of the P4+1, including Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia, in Vienna are aimed at resuming the relevant parties' commitment to the JCPOA, and setting the mechanism for lifting U.S. economic and financial sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Despite major progresses, the talks have also met with obstacles that could make an immediate revival of the deal

a far cry.

In the meantime, regional convergence may also rank high on the agenda of next government.

Although there are challenges in this regard, what can guarantee the political success of the future government could be a strategic relationship with neighboring countries.

Recently, Iran and Saudi Arabia have entered into negotiations, brokered by Iraq, in a bid to ease tensions and to settle disputes over rivalry political influences in Syria, Yemen and Iraq.

UNCONTROLLED PANDEMIC
Iran's already injured economy under the U.S. sanctions has been dampened further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the foreign sanctions, the disease has taken a heavy toll on the health sector, as well as the business of companies and households, and most importantly the pandemic

has also caused social and psychological impact.

According to Iranian official figures, over 3 million people have contracted the virus, and more than 82,000 of them have died.

By Saturday, 4,374,729 people have received coronavirus vaccines in the country, with 906,546 having been fully inoculated.

Iranian authorities have denounced the U.S. sanctions and delays in the shipments of vaccines as a drag on its vaccination campaign.

The next president should have a precise understanding of inflation and its dynamics, negative investment growth, and the complex system of sanctions among a host of other issues, Masoud Khansari, head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, told the Persian daily Donya-e-Eqtasad.

Our Regional...

We started, I was more hopeful. I'm not saying that we lose hope in that regard, because the alternative is not good. Alternative is worse for the people of Afghanistan. But I do believe that the time spent in negotiations, without being further used and utilized in a much better way, especially by the Taliban and mainly by the Taliban. They shouldn't have wasted time.

That was an opportunity for both sides to settle major part of the differences and move on towards the next

phase, where Taliban's main demand, whether it was their main demand or this was an excuse for waging war, was the withdrawal of the NATO troops, international troops, without materializing in a few weeks' time.

But unfortunately, the Taliban have not taken it as such. And, in exchange, they have increased the level of violence in the country.

Anadolu Agency: Apart from the raging war, Afghanistan is clearly struggling to cope up with the COVID-19 pandemic, what do you think should be done more

about this?

Abdullah Abdullah: The third wave of COVID in Afghanistan is more deadly. More contaminating, more serious, and more widespread than the previous wave.

Different countries have experienced success recently. It's mainly related to the vaccination but all the other measures as well.

Countries and international organizations can help, sharing their experience, sometimes with technical support and support in terms of vaccines in Afghanistan.

Pres Biden...

minorities. The United States will remain deeply engaged with the Government of Afghanistan to ensure the

country never again becomes a safe haven for terrorist groups who pose a threat to the U.S. homeland. The United States continues to fully

support the ongoing peace process and encourages all Afghan parties to participate meaningfully in negotiations to bring an end to the conflict.

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Over 2.62B coronavirus vaccine shots given worldwide

Over 2.62 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines have been given worldwide so far, figures compiled by Our World in Data, a tracking website, showed on Sunday.

China leads the global count with over 1.1 billion jabs, followed by the US with 317.17 million.

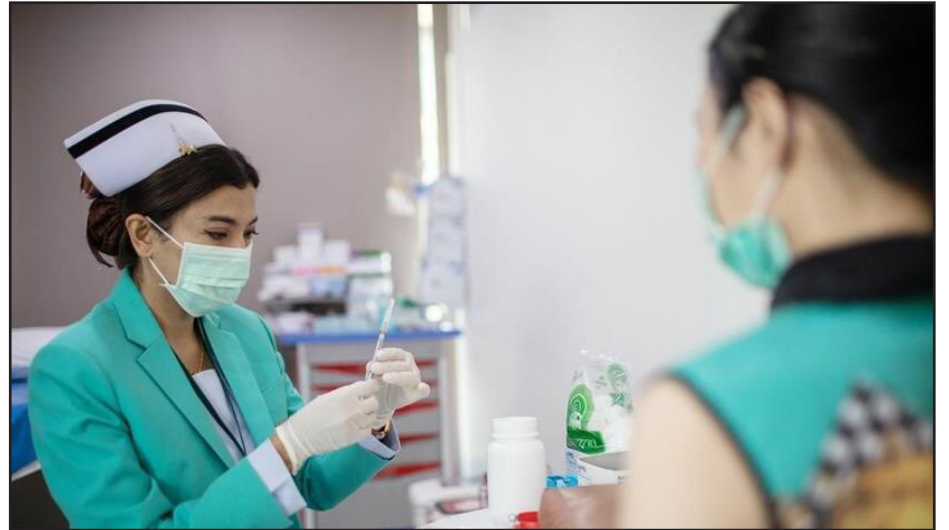
India has administered 276.69 million shots, Brazil 86.47 million, the UK 73.76 million, Germany 65.74 million, France 47.71 million, and Italy 45.57 million. Turkey ranks ninth on the list with over 41.34 million doses given, followed by Mexico, Spain, Indonesia, and Russia. The country with the most doses

administered by population is the United Arab Emirates, with 144.89 doses per 100 people.

Most COVID-19 vaccines are administered in two doses, so the number of shots given is not the same as the number of individuals fully vaccinated.

Since December 2019, the pandemic has claimed over 3.86 million lives in 192 countries and regions, with more than 178.27 million cases reported worldwide, according to the US-based Johns Hopkins University.

The US, India, and Brazil remain the worst-hit countries.



A look at the world

Brazil's COVID-19 death toll passes 500,000, second only to U.S.

Brazil's death toll from COVID-19 surpassed 500,000 on Saturday, the country's health minister said, the worst official death toll in the world trailing only the United States. Experts warn that the situation may even worsen due to delayed vaccinations and the government's refusal to back social distancing measures.

Only 11 percent of Brazilians have been fully vaccinated and epidemiologists warn that, with winter arriving in the southern hemisphere and new variants of the coronavirus circulating, deaths will



continue to mount even if immunizations gain steam.

Brazil has registered 500,800 deaths from 17,883,750 confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to health ministry data on Saturday. Over the past week, Brazil has averaged 2,000 deaths per day.

The pandemic continues to devastate countries around the region with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reporting 1.1 million new confirmed COVID-19 cases and 31,000 deaths in the Americas last week. PAHO noted upticks in six Mexican states, Belize, Guatemala, Panama and some places in the Caribbean. PAHO warned that Colombia's COVID-19 situation is at its worst point yet, with intensive care unit beds filled in major cities.

Experts see the toll in Brazil, already the highest in Latin America, climbing far higher.

"I think we are going to reach 700,000 or 800,000 deaths before we get to see the effects of vaccination," said Gonzalo Vecina, former head of Brazilian health regulator Anvisa, predicting a near-term acceleration in fatalities.

Brazil is experiencing the arrival of these new variants and the Delta variant, first identified in India, will send the country for a loop, Vecina added.

Biden to host Israeli president on June 28



U.S. President Joe Biden will host Israeli President Reuven Rivlin at the White House on June 28, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Saturday.

"President Rivlin's visit will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Israel and the deep ties between our governments and our people," Psaki said in a statement.

"As President Rivlin approaches the end of his term, this visit will honor the dedication he has shown to strengthening the friendship between the two countries over the course of many years," she added.

Rivlin is due to retire next month after the end of his seven-year term.

Israel's former Labor chairman and opposition leader Isaac Herzog was chosen by the parliament earlier this month to be the next Israeli president. He would be sworn in at an official ceremony in July.

The role of the president in Israel is mainly ceremonial with little executive power. The president of Israel is elected for seven years and cannot serve more than a single term.

Three major challenges Iranian president-elect faces

The Iranian Interior Ministry on Saturday announced Ebrahim Raisi as the winner of the country's 13th presidential election.

The president-elect will assume office in August in face of three major challenges in boosting economy, dispelling political concerns and fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY During the TV debates before the presidential voting, all the qualified candidates unanimously acknowledged uncertainty in the economic outlook of the country, with some slamming the U.S. sanctions and COVID-19 pandemic as the major causes of the country's current poor



economic condition. Government officials pledged to curb the inflation rate and to restore economic growth after the 2015 nuclear deal was reached and major international and Western anti-Iran sanctions were lifted by then, but such a hope started to fade away following former U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the deal in 2018 and reimpose sanctions on Tehran. Some analysts believe that Iran has missed the opportunity to carry out monetary and budgetary reforms, attract foreign investments, and restore stability and growth in economy.

According to Financial Tribune daily on June 16, currently the country's budget imbalance stands at 50 percent.

It means that the country's expenses will soon outgrow resources, and will increase the likelihood of future defaults unless the general condition of the country improves, the report quoted Masoud Nili, a senior Iranian economic expert, as saying.

The International Monetary Fund expects the inflation rate in Iran to rise to 39 percent in 2021 from 36.5 percent last year and the unemployment rate to increase from 10.8 percent to 11.2 percent, according to the report.... **P3**



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