

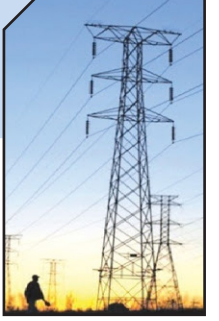


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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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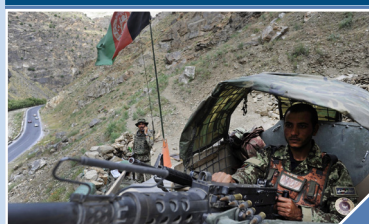
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Senior Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party leader Usman Kakar passes away

Usman Khan Kakar, a senior leader of the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), has passed away in Karachi. Confirming the death of the leader, Information-Secretary PKMAP Reza Mohammad Reza said that Kakar was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Karachi.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and Senator Saleem Mandviwalla said that the news of Usman Khan Kakar's demise was received during a meeting of the Senate Committee on Finance. It may be recalled that a few days ago, Usman Kakar fell in his house in Quetta and was seriously injured. Usman Kakar was rushed to... **P2**



Afghan Govt Retake Districts and Taliban Capture District Bordering Tajikistan

Taliban militants have reportedly captured Imam Sahib district in Afghanistan Kunduz province, which borders Panj district of the Tajik southwest province of Khatlon.

"Taliban militants captured Imam Sahib district a little over an hour ago and they are currently besieging the city of Kunduz itself," Ajmal Kakar, a reporter for Afghanistan's Pajhwok news agency, told Asia-Plus at around 4:30 pm.

"The gates at the entrance to the city are already in the hands of the Taliban, the city itself is under siege. Things are heating up in the city," Mr. Kakar said. He also noted that no losses are reported at present. "There may be no casualties as government forces are retreating," Afghan reporter added. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's TOLO News, citing the Afghan Ministry of Defense, said on June 21 that Bangi and Khwaja Ghar districts in the northern Takhar province, which also borders Tajikistan's Khatlon province, were retaken from the... **P3**

Ghani Meets with Leading Politicians to Discuss Peace Process



Presidential Palace (ARG), the politicians also agreed a united front was necessary.

"It was also emphasized at the meeting that a united front and a strong political consensus were necessary to strengthen peace and stability, strengthen the republican system and support the country's security forces and make strong use of the strong popular support for the republican system to consolidate stability," ARG said. Participants at the meeting also discussed Ghani and his entourage's planned visit to the United States, which they called "significant."

President Ashraf Ghani met with the country's political and jihadi leaders on Monday morning who stressed that the peace process is a priority for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and that "all further steps in this process, will be taken with the necessary understanding and consensus."

Present at the meeting were

Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation; Hamid Karzai, former president; Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, former Jihadi leader; Mohammad Sarwar Danesh, Second Vice President; Mohammad Yunus Qanuni, former vice president; Fazl Hadi Muslimyar, Speaker of the Senate; Mir Rahman Rahmani,

Speaker of the House of Representatives; Mohammad Karim Khalili, leader of the Islamic Unity Party; Mohammad Ismail Khan, a member of the leadership of the Islamic Jamiat of Afghanistan; and a number of other senior politicians and officials. According to a statement issued by the

On Sunday, the White House announced that Ghani and Abdullah were scheduled to travel to the US on June 25. US President Joe Biden is scheduled to meet with the Afghan leaders to discuss continued US-Afghan cooperation, as well as the withdrawal of US troops from the country.

First International Flight Lands in Khost Province

Afghanistan's civil aviation authority announced that the first international flight took place from eastern newly built Khost airport. The civil aviation authority said in a statement that Ariana Airlines made its first international flight from the United Arab Emirates to Khost Airport at 8:10 am on Thursday, carrying 90 passengers, which was warmly welcomed by the people of Khost province.

According to the statement, the airline's international flights will continue every week at the airport.

Foreign airlines such as Al-Arabiya have also expressed interest in flying to the airport in separate letters, the statement added.



I Am Neither Taliban's Spokesperson nor Their Lawyer: Qureshi

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi spoke on the Afghan Peace Process, saying that neither is he the Taliban's spokesperson nor the group's lawyer.

"I am only Pakistan's foreign minister," FM Qureshi said, addressing a news conference in Islamabad.

The foreign minister said he had responded as a Pakistani to the Afghan national security advisor's recent anti-Pakistan response.

"The Afghan NSA's statement did not benefit his country," the foreign minister said, adding: "Pakistan has always tried to persuade the Taliban to negotiate."

Last week, talking to TRT World during his visit to Antalya, Turkey, the foreign minister had said that one "cannot pass the buck to Pakistan" for peace and stability in



Afghanistan.

The foreign minister had said that Pakistan had been engaged constructively for peace and stability in Afghanistan and would continue to do so.

"But this is a shared responsibility.

You cannot pass the buck towards Pakistan.

"Pakistan is one regional player. There are other global players and there are other interests that are paramount in the region," the foreign minister said.

Senior...

a hospital and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Condolences Upon receiving the news of Senator Kakar's demise, leaders of different political parties in Afghanistan and Pakistan started expressing their condolences.

Remembering Kakar, Deputy Speaker National Assembly Qasim Suri said that the deceased was a patriotic political and social leader.

"Usman Khan Kakar fought for the rights of the people of Balochistan and always voiced their concerns," Suri said. Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaisar also expressed his condolences and said that Kakar's contribution towards the rights of Balochistan, along with his socio-political services, will always be remembered. Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar also sent his commiserations to the family members of the deceased and prayed for the departed soul. JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman also expressed his condolences and said that the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has been deprived of a brave leader. Former president and PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari, PPP's Sherry Rehman, and ANP Sindh's President Shahi Sayed also expressed their grief over Senator Kakar's demise.

India Records...

vaccination appointments. Malaysia's vaccination program to go through February 2022 will be conducted in three phases, with the first phase for frontline workers covering about half a million people, the second phase for high-risk groups and the third phase for adults aged 18 and above. As of Sunday, some 4.2 million people or 12.9 percent of the total population have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccines.

By: Arwin Rahi

Pakistan Must Not Become a Launchpad for America's Afghan War

Unconfirmed reports about Pakistan providing the United States with military bases on its soil have been floating around as of late. At such a crucial time, when regional and global stakeholders are trying to find a solution to the Afghan conflict, such a Pakistani offer will complicate things for Islamabad. Pakistan's past military engagements with the United States should serve as an eye-opener to help it make the right decision this time around.

At the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, Pakistan had a substantial amount of military cooperation with the United States, receiving generous military assistance from the superpower. While the United States intended its military assistance to Pakistan for use against the communist threat, Pakistan sought to take advantage of its partnership to bolster its offensive and defensive capabilities vis-à-vis India.

No wonder in 1965, when the Indo-Pakistani war broke out, the United States imposed an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan. The arms embargo remained in place during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War as well. Unlike India, Pakistan was dependent on U.S. arms, equipment, and spare parts; thus, the embargo impacted Pakistan's military capability. Since the United States and Pakistan were pursuing different objectives, the military partnership was bound to end on a sad note for the one on the receiving end of the assistance.

Similarly, the U.S.-Pakistan "alliance" in the 1980s, when Pakistan signed up with the United States to bleed the Soviets in Afghanistan, ended on a sad note for Pakistan. After the U.S. objective was achieved and the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan for its nuclear program. The United States ignored all the challenges (millions of Afghan refugees, thousands of armed men and drugs in Pakistan, and civil war in Afghanistan) Pakistan was facing



at the time. The United States then imposed more sanctions on Pakistan after it conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998.

The United States, however, was back with a list of demands for Pakistan after the 9/11 terror attacks. General Pervez Musharraf accepted all the U.S. demands regarding the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Against all diplomatic protocols, Pakistan arrested and handed over Abdus Salam Zaeef, the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad, to the United States. From 2001 until U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan ended in late 2014, former Pakistani general Asad Durrani says, "Most of the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan were launched from Pasni and Dalbandin bases located on Baloch territory."

General Musharraf used to act more hawkish than most American hawks.

He repeatedly told Americans to hit the Pashtun tribes ruthlessly. He had allowed the CIA to operate drones in Pakistan as early as 2004. He even suggested that U.S. drones be painted in Pakistan Air Force colors, which the CIA refused. Pakistani diplomatic protests after every drone attack in Pakistan were orchestrated to placate a domestic audience, rather than serve as an actual condemnation of the attacks. After Musharraf stepped down, his mantle and his demeanor were both passed onto Asif Ali Zardari, who, while referring to U.S. drone attacks in the tribal areas, told Americans to "kill the seniors, collateral damage worries you Americans. It does not worry me." Well, collateral damage may not have worried Zardari and company, but since 2001 it has left a lasting scar on those impacted in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In fact,

the so-called War on Terror, which Musharraf committed Pakistan to, brought more war and more terror to Pakistan and the region.

Allowing U.S. military bases on Pakistani soil raises several complications for Islamabad.

First, after the Taliban assume ascendancy in Afghanistan, any strikes on Afghanistan from Pakistani territory by the United States will further strain Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations and dash any and all hopes of good neighborly relations for the foreseeable future. Afghanistan and Pakistan are at a crossroads of history. They can either reach a mutual understanding regarding all their outstanding issues, preferably within the framework of a strategic agreement, or continue with tension in bilateral relations, entailing negative consequences for both countries. Pakistan... **P3**

By: Andrew Korybko

Why Tajikistan Is Emerging as China's Gateway to Afghanistan

China's overhauling of Tajikistan's highway network in its sparsely populated, mountainous, and geographically enormous Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAR) speaks to Beijing's desire to increasingly rely on that neighbouring country for facilitating its planned connectivity with Afghanistan after the US' impending withdrawal. Eurasianet, a US-based media outlet partially funded by both the National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Foundation, reported on this though in a predictably negative way given the interests of its financiers. Nevertheless, their report served to raise awareness of the important connectivity work that China's carrying out in Tajikistan.

A quick glance at the map reveals that the GBAR is the most logical means for China to connect with Afghanistan. Although Pakistan can also be relied upon for this end, China always pioneers complementary corridors so that it isn't dependent on any single one. This helps to relieve congestion along those routes and also enables the country to flexibly adapt to changing geopolitical circumstances in the event that a sudden security situation makes one of them temporarily unusable. What's most interesting about this is that Tajikistan is regarded as being within Russia's "sphere of influence" so this essentially means that Moscow is indirectly facilitating Beijing's access to Afghanistan and likely also Iran too.

Although some structural realists regard Russia and China as being competitors in Central Asia, or at the very least are inevitably poised to become such according to one school of thought, they actually cooperate really closely in this region. All of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) are in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that's jointly led by those two Great Powers. They share the same political, security, and socio-economic interests as well. While China's economic influence is definitely on the rise, Russia's political and security influence remains strong as proven by the fact that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are in a mutual defence alliance with it through the Collective Security Treaty

Organisation (CSTO). Building upon the observation that Russian-allied Tajikistan is facilitating China's connectivity with Afghanistan, one can have a better understanding of how Moscow and Beijing work in tandem to pursue the shared goal of regional stability. Russia has a military base in Tajikistan and is committed to protecting its ally from Afghan-emanating threats such as ISIS-K, which will also serve China's security interests insofar as protecting its Silk Road across the GBAR. The People's Republic is so economically strong that it can invest much more in the region (which includes Afghanistan in this context) than Russia can, which can help rebuild Afghanistan and also improve the living standards of the impoverished Pamiri people in the GBAR. It should also be mentioned that Tajikistan is one of Pakistan's top regional partners. President

Rahmon visited Islamabad in early June, which came a little over a month after I published my piece here at the Express Tribune about "The Prospects Of A Pakistan-Tajikistan Strategic Partnership". It should be read by anyone who's interested in the new northern vector of Pakistani foreign policy. Basically, I argue that Tajikistan can serve as Pakistan's gateway to the CARs and that the two can also cooperate on stabilising Afghanistan after the American withdrawal later this year because of the influence that they command over certain parts of their mutual neighbour's society. Casual readers might not be aware of it, but Tajikistan is mostly populated by a people that are very closely related to Iranians. Although bilateral relations remain complicated, Iran nevertheless also sees Tajikistan as a gateway to the region. Considering that... **P3**

Kabul Residents: Bills Increase as Power Service Worsens

Kabul residents say they have electricity in their homes only limited hours per day, but their electricity bills have increased.

The residents added that the lack of electricity has made life difficult for them, as the third wave of COVID-19 is spreading and the weather is getting hot.

Residents allege that the nation's electric company, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherket (DABS), is not capable of providing standard electricity for the citizens.

"The power outages are so frequent, the officials should define and create a proper strategy to address the power outage problem," said Kanishka, a Kabul resident.

"There is no electricity in winter at all, we don't have electricity in spring

either," said Sahel, a Kabul resident. "When we sleep, there is no electricity and when we wake up, there is no electricity, either. We do not know what electricity is!" said Khalid, another Kabul resident.

The targeting of power pylons since the beginning of the current solar year in the north of Kabul has been one of the reasons for power outages in Kabul and other provinces.

"According to the country's applicable laws, the destruction of power pylons and public facilities by individuals and groups is considered a crime," said Faiz Mohammad Zadran, an expert in the energy sector.

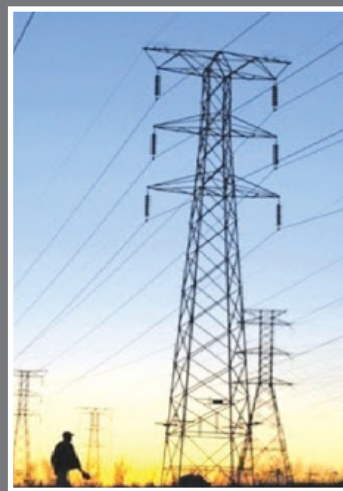
Although the government has repeatedly talked of taking measures to prevent the targeting of power pylons, it does not seem

to be addressing the issue, as the destruction has continued across the country in recent months.

Breshna officials say that due to the blowing-up of two power poles in Salang district in Parwan province last week, there is a shortage of 200 megawatts of electricity in the capital's power network and the company is currently cutting the power of the capital for up to 14 hours every 24 hours.

"Breshna has been grappling with the power shortage over the last two months," said Sangar Niazi, a spokesman for Breshna.

According to information provided by Breshna, Kabul currently requires 500 megawatts of electricity, of which 100 megawatts are domestically produced and another 200



megawatts are imported, leaving a deficit of 200 megawatts.

A number of economic experts who criticize the irregularities in the supply of energy services in the country are calling on the government to review Breshna's plans and to find a solution for the electricity problems as the citizens across the country suffer power outages.

Why Tajikistan...

China is pioneering a Silk Road through the GBAR in order to connect more closely with Afghanistan and likely also its new 25-year strategic partner Iran, it's possible that Iranian-Tajikistani relations will eventually improve as a result of Beijing's "economic diplomacy". In any case, Tajikistan is quickly becoming the convergence point of some of Eurasia's most important countries, all of whom have a stake in post-withdrawal Afghanistan.

This observation should inspire them to more actively engage with Tajikistan. Some of these countries like Russia and Iran already have plenty experts specialising in its affairs, while China's and Pakistan's respectfully lag somewhat behind their peers if only for the simple reason that they hadn't paid much attention to Tajikistan until recently. It's therefore fitting that China and Pakistan joined forces in 2016 to establish the Quadrilateral Cooperation & Coordination Mechanism (QCCM) together with Tajikistan and Afghanistan to enhance their hitherto bilateral security engagement efforts with both of them. Thus far, neither Russia nor Iran are part of any comparative platform incorporating those two countries.

With this in mind, Pakistan should propose an economic counterpart to the QCCM as part of its new multipolar grand strategy prioritising regional connectivity. Pakistan's northern-focused economic outreaches overlap with China's western-focused ones in Afghanistan and Tajikistan so it makes sense to either create a complementary institution or evolve the QCCM's mission just like the SCO's evolved. Although Tajikistan is a comparatively tiny country, it's disproportionately strategic given its location and the influence that it has among its ethnic compatriots in Afghanistan. The proposed economic mechanism could help Pakistan tap into its multidimensional potential, forge a new regional economic community, and expand its influence in the CARs.

Pakistan...

wants to expand commercial and energy ties with Central Asian republics through Afghanistan. Since the early 1990s, Pakistan's aspirations to trade with Central Asia have been upset by, and remained unfulfilled due to, the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan can only be directly linked with Central Asia if there is stability in Afghanistan, and if Afghanistan-Pakistan ties are warm. The United States once again bombing Afghanistan from military bases in Pakistan will pour cold water on any prospects of improved bilateral relations.

Second, if the United States bombs Afghanistan from Pakistani military bases, regardless of who will be in power in Kabul, Afghanistan will most likely respond to these provocations by deepening and expanding ties with India. The Taliban have already declared that "Kashmir is India's internal matter" and called on Pakistan not to link Afghanistan with Kashmir. Once the Taliban are back in Kabul and tensions rise with Islamabad, it is very likely that the Taliban will develop cordial ties with India, following in the footsteps of the Afghan Mujahedin.

It largely depends on Pakistan whether or not the Taliban strengthen its ties with India. So far, the much exaggerated Indian presence in Afghanistan is modest in scope and certainly is less significant than Pakistan's own presence and assets in Afghanistan. That being said, there's a serious potential for further developing and exploring Indo-Afghan ties. Given that India is interested in Balochistan, should the present illusory Indo-Afghan collusion materialize, it can

destabilize Pakistan and pose a serious challenge to the Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Third, Pakistan is also very likely to experience complications in its relations with its two other neighbors, namely China and Iran, if it provides the United States with military bases on its soil. As Pakistan observers rightly believe, China certainly will not be comfortable with U.S. planes and drones flying around when it is investing in Pakistan and trying to complete the CPEC. Iran will also view the U.S. military presence in Pakistan as a U.S. attempt to encircle it. In response, Iran will likely support anti-U.S. elements in Pakistan which in the medium to long run will also have consequences for Pakistan's Sunni-Shia sectarian divide.

Fourth, the U.S. military presence in Pakistan will help the further rise of religious extremism, where extremists are already in no short supply. The U.S. military presence will encourage militant and terrorist groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to step up its attacks on government facilities and personnel as legitimate targets for collaborating with the United States. Religious parties will also exploit such a development to embarrass and weaken the civilian government.

Fifth and finally, given that the United States lacks popular support amongst ordinary Pakistanis, the Pakistani government will also have to sacrifice its popularity and possibly its time in office should it decide to offer the United States military bases. In 2014, after the Palestinian territories, Pakistanis disapproved of and

hated the United States more than any other country in the world. The cost for Pakistan of U.S. military bases on its soil simply outweighs any benefits that might be associated with it.

Lessons for the future
At this critical juncture in the region's history, Pakistan must learn from its past military partnerships with the United States, which will once again abandon Pakistan as soon as its objectives are achieved. Partnerships and alliances are built on firm grounds of mutual interest and shared values. The long and troubled history of U.S.-Pakistani relations suggests that their partnerships were neither rooted in mutual interest nor in shared values. The partnerships were rather temporary affairs and broke apart as soon as the external factor bringing the two countries together was removed.

Pakistan's concern, if any, that India will step forward and provide military bases to the United States is unfounded and unjustified. India has no borders with Afghanistan. If India offers the U.S. military bases, the latter will still require overflight rights from Pakistan. As a sovereign and responsible nation, Pakistan must say no to any requests from the United States for overflight rights to bomb Afghanistan from India or any other country. Acquiescing to such U.S. demands will also go against countless official statements by both Afghanistan and Pakistan to not allow their respective territory to be used against each other.

Afghan...

Taliban in an operation by government and public uprising forces on Monday morning.

The operation was reportedly launched on Sunday night with Air Force support and

"the districts were cleared of Taliban this morning," the ministry said in its statement on Monday.

"The Taliban escaped from the district after suffering heavy casualties," the Defense Ministry said.

The statement also mentioned that Abdal and Qara Parcho villages on the outskirts of the Taluqan city, capital of the province, were also cleared of the Taliban.

Taliban has not yet commented on the operation.

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Iran's President-Elect Says He Won't Meet with Biden

Iran's president-elect said Monday he would not meet with President Joe Biden nor negotiate over Tehran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, sticking to a hard-line position following his landslide victory in last week's election. Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi also described himself as a "defender of human rights" when asked about his involvement in the 1988 mass execution of some 5,000 people. It marked the first time he's been put on the spot on live television over that dark moment in Iranian history at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. "The U.S. is obliged to lift all oppressive sanctions against Iran," Raisi said at the news conference. Raisi sat in front of a sea of microphones, most from Iran and countries

home to militias supported by Tehran. He looked nervous at the beginning of his comments but slowly became more at ease over the hourlong news conference. Asked about Iran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, Raisi described the issues as "non-negotiable." Tehran's fleet of attack aircraft date largely back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, forcing Iran to instead invest in missiles as a hedge against its regional Arab neighbors, who have purchased billions of dollars in American military hardware over the years. Iran also relies on militias like Yemen's Houthis and Lebanon's Hezbollah to counterbalance against enemies like Saudi Arabia and Israel, respectively.



A look at the world

EU Extends Sanctions Against Russia Over Illegal Annexation of Crimea

EU foreign ministers on Monday decided to extend economic sanctions against Russia over illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol for another year. European companies involved in telecommunications, transport and energy sectors are also not allowed to export goods and services to local firms under the measures.

The decision maintains the ban on import of goods from Crimea and Sevastopol, and targets financial investments and tourism



in the area as well.

The sanctions, which have been in place since 2014, are renewed until June 23, 2022.

The EU-Russia relations have deteriorated significantly over the past years.

Last week, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell revealed his proposal for guiding the bloc's relations with Russia.

He recommended that EU leaders base their policy on three key principles, namely "push back, constraints and engaging Russia."

EU heads of states and governments are expected to adopt their position on relations with Russia at their upcoming summit, starting on Thursday.

The bloc has been applying different sanction regimes since 2014, including asset freeze and travel restrictions in response to the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and Moscow's reluctance to fully implement the Minsk agreement meant to establish a cease-fire in Eastern Ukraine.

The EU also imposed sanctions on four Russian high-ranking officials over opposition figure Aleksey Navalny's arbitrary arrest, prosecution and sentencing under its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime in March.

India Records Lowest Daily Cases in 88 Days



India has reported 53,256 new COVID-19 cases over the past day -- the lowest daily count in 88 days, the Health Ministry said on Monday.

With the new figures, the nationwide tally of cases has reached nearly 30 million.

The death toll now stands at 388,135 with 1,422 more fatalities in the last 24 hours, which is the lowest in 65 days.

A total of 78,190 patients won the battle against the virus over the past day.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), nearly 400 million COVID-19 tests have been conducted so far.

Meanwhile, the government started a decentralized policy for vaccination from Monday under which states will be given the doses free-of-cost. Earlier, the states had to pay the central government for the procurement.

Malaysia reported another 4,611 new COVID-19 infections, bringing the national total to 701,019, the health ministry said on Monday.

Health Ministry Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah said in a press statement that another 69 more deaths have been reported, bringing the death toll to 4,477.

The official added that there is a disturbing rise in the number of sporadic cases and symptomless cases in the Klang Valley area, which encompasses the capital city of Kuala Lumpur and part of the adjacent Selangor state.

Sporadic cases refer to cases which are not traced to existing case clusters, he said, warning that those without symptoms are still infectious.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced earlier in the day the start of phase 3 of the country's national COVID-19 immunization program covering people 18 years old and above, first to be implemented with Kuala Lumpur and Selangor state.

Khairy, who is also the coordinating minister for Malaysia's national COVID-19 immunization program, said the program had been expedited as almost all senior citizens in the area had either received their first dose or had been given... P2

EU To Blacklist 86 Belarus Officials and Companies

The European Union will on Monday impose travel bans and asset freezes on 86 Belarusian individuals and companies, but will leave the decision on when to impose economic sanctions to leaders, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

In an attempt to put more pressure on President Alexander Lukashenko over the forced landing of a Ryanair passenger plane in Minsk on May 23, the individual sanctions will hit 76 Belarusians, including the transport



and defence ministers, as well as eight state entities, diplomats said.

"Today we will approve the package of new sanctions, which is a wider package, about 86 people and entities," Borrell told reporters as he arrived for a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

Diplomats said the measures could be in coordination with similar sanctions by other Western countries, such as Britain and the United States, although they did not have details.

On Friday, EU states provisionally agreed economic sanctions on Belarus's oil, potash and banking sectors to try to punish Lukashenko for the interception last month of the Ryanair flight and arrest of dissident journalist Roman Protasevich and his student girlfriend Sofia Sapega, who were on board.

Borrell, who is the EU's top diplomat, said the economic sanctions would not be approved by foreign ministers. "They will be presented to the European Council at their next meeting," Borrell said, referring to Thursday's summit in Brussels.



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