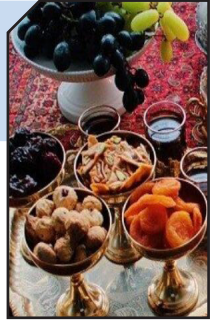




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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

Issue No. 1000

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10 afs

unicef
for every child

UN: Violence in Afghanistan Kills 27, Wounded 136 Children in 72 Hours

The UN children's agency has said at least 27 children have been killed and 136 injured across three provinces of Afghanistan during the past three days amid escalating violence. "UNICEF is shocked by the rapid escalation of grave violations against children in Afghanistan," UNICEF country representative Hervé Ludovic De Lys said in an emailed statement. The atrocities grow higher by the day." The deaths and injuries were reported in Kandahar, Khost and Pakria provinces. Media workers targeted
Last month the NAI report at least 30 journalists and media workers have been killed, wounded or abducted... P3



Germany Rejects Calls for Troops to Return to Afghanistan

Germany's defense minister rejected on Monday calls for its soldiers to return to Afghanistan after Taliban insurgents took Kunduz city where German troops were deployed for a decade. Germany had the second largest military contingent in Afghanistan after the United States, losing more troops in combat in Kunduz than anywhere else since World War Two. The Taliban overran three provincial capitals including Kunduz at the weekend as it pressed an offensive since foreign troops began a withdrawal. "The reports from Kunduz and from all over Afghanistan are bitter and hurt a lot," Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said on Twitter. "Are society and parliament prepared to send the armed forces into a war and remain there with lots of troops for at least a generation? If we are not, then the joint withdrawal with the partners remains the right decision."... P3

ARG: Public Uprising Forces to Be United, Equipped



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani meets political leaders and discussed Afghanistan's ongoing security situation in Presidential Palace (ARG) on Monday, August 9. The fresh intra-leaders' get-togethers and that with President Ghani come at a time when the Taliban have toppled four

provinces and have entered the fifth provincial capital of Takhar province. In Monday's gathering, the Afghan President met Yunus Qanuni, Abdullah Abdullah, Abdurab Rasool Sayaf, Muhammad Muhaqiq, Mir Rahman Rahmani, Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Sarwar Danish. Afghan

Presidential Palace in a statement said that the political leaders voiced their support to Afghan Defense and Security Forces and reiterated that the gains of the past twenty years should be protected. The statement further adds that the political leaders support and unanimously request the survival

and continuation of the republic. "In the get-together, parties agreed upon mobilization, equipping, and strengthening of armed uprising around the country." reads the statement. Prior to that Marshal Abdu Rashid Dostum had met with acting defense minister Bismillah Muhammadi and had discussed the security situation of the northern provinces. Earlier this month there had been series of gatherings of patriarchs of Kandahar province and former president Hamid Karzai. The apparent internal consensus comes as the US, UN, Russia, and immediate neighbors of Afghanistan are set to hold a gathering on the Afghan peace process in Doha. Meanwhile, #SanctionPakistan is widely used by social media users yesterday (on Monday), especially on Twitter and Facebook. The hashtag was launched against Pakistan's proxy war in Afghanistan & its support for Taliban. One wrote: 'The heart of Asia Afghanistan, is burning in war today & the reason is clear-Pakistan.' Afghans across the world are holding protests against Pakistan under the slogan of. 'SanctionPakistan'.

6th Provincial Capital in Afghanistan Falls into Taliban's Hands

Taliban militants seized another provincial capital in northern Afghanistan on Monday, the sixth to fall in the past four days, officials confirmed. The insurgent group has captured the main government facilities in Aybak city, the capital of Samangan province, according to provincial councilor Raz Mohammad and two lawmakers representing the province in parliament. Pro-government forces abandoned the city and fled to a hilltop called Koh-e Bast after the central government failed to send reinforcements and carry out airstrikes in their support, one of the lawmakers, Mahboba... P3



Pakistan to Host Regional Conference on Afghanistan

Pakistan is likely to host a regional conference on Afghanistan as part of a diplomatic push to prevent a civil war in the war-torn neighboring country, according to a media report on Monday. We are planning to host foreign ministers of the key regional countries on the Afghan situation, The Express Tribune quoted a senior Pakistani official as saying. The official added that they could not provide the list of invitees. However, sources said foreign ministers of the neighbors of Afghanistan, including Russia, China, Iran and other stakeholders like Turkey would attend the conference. The idea behind the initiative is to discuss the latest situation and evolve a consensus to prevent a civil war in Afghanistan, the report said. The neighbors of Afghanistan are concerned that



the deteriorating situation in the war-torn country would have a negative impact on the region. A Taliban surge in Afghanistan has intensified as US and NATO troops wrap up their withdrawal from the country. With Taliban attacks increasing, Afghan security forces and government troops have retaliated with airstrikes aided by the United States. Pakistan has a

central role in the Afghan endgame, but as the situation deteriorates in the neighboring country, there are elements within Afghanistan as well as in the US which are holding Islamabad responsible for the mess, the report said. Officials familiar with the development said Pakistan would counter such allegations at all levels and insisted that the civil war in... P2

Pakistan...

Afghanistan would harm the country more than anyone else. While Pakistan contemplates hosting the foreign ministers of regional countries, the plan to organize a meeting of leaders of different factions of Afghanistan is now in the doldrums. Pakistan was supposed to host the Afghan Peace Conference last month as part of its diplomatic initiative to bring all Afghan players on board. The conference, however, was postponed after Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani refused to send a delegation. The sources said the conference's idea had now been shelved altogether given the deepening mistrust between Pakistan and the Afghan government. According to the sources, while Pakistan would continue to seek a political settlement in Afghanistan, the focus would now be on securing the border to minimize the impact of the Afghan civil war. Pakistan has already fenced the 2,600km long border with Afghanistan coupled with introducing a new mechanism that regulates the movement of people between the two frontiers. Another aspect of the strategy includes stepping up the campaign against the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is likely to get emboldened against the backdrop of the Afghan Taliban's victory. Pakistan's efforts to persuade the Afghan Taliban to take action against the TTP were met with a lukewarm response. Therefore, the sources said Pakistan had decided to fight its own battle instead of pinning hopes on others to take on the TTP. There has been a sudden spike in TTP terrorist attacks since the US and NATO forces started withdrawing from Afghanistan and as a result, the Taliban started making rapid inroads.

By: James B. Cunningham

Don't Lose Afghanistan

Staging a major military offensive. Ignoring calls for peace negotiations. Threatening women and executing prisoners and civilians. Given the Taliban's behavior lately, US President Joe Biden's decision to rapidly withdraw US forces from Afghanistan appears increasingly questionable. While it's not certain the Afghan resistance to the Taliban will crumble, a catastrophic outcome is still possible. Abandoning a courageous people as they attempt to fight back could leave millions of Afghans vulnerable to Taliban repression. That's why we recommend a course correction involving redoubled efforts to support the Afghan security forces—particularly through airpower, which is immediately critical—as well as the vigorous implementation of US promises of continued security, economic, humanitarian, and diplomatic support. With continued limited engagement, which is the approach the United States is currently taking in Iraq, it is not too late to avoid complete state collapse and more chaos in the region. But the US government must act swiftly and resolutely in Afghanistan and in mustering global support. A country in the balance In consistently failing to engage the Afghan government in good-faith negotiations, the Taliban has signaled that it is going for all-out victory. The terms the group seeks—control over the country's police, military, and intelligence service, as well as the power to effectively remove and appoint the head of state and other top officials—amount to a demand for surrender. The Taliban has also broken promises to keep freed prisoners off the battlefield and maintained its ties with al-Qaeda, while continuing to mistreat women and girls as well as mete out brutal justice against perceived enemies. Its members are flouting the supposed commitments they made to take the Doha peace process seriously. All this suggests that the Taliban is intent on removing the current elected government in Kabul and restoring something resembling the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, consistent polling over many years suggests that large numbers of Afghans do not want to live under the Taliban. Those figures are now reflected on the battlefield as civilians increasingly join the resistance. In the western provincial capital of Herat, for example, an uprising led by former warlord Ismail Khan and aided by Afghan security forces pushed the Taliban back in recent days. That led to dancing and singing in the streets of Herat—celebrations that were soon echoed in Kabul. Yet while Afghans' willingness to take up arms against the Taliban appears to be growing, it is not yet widespread. Significant in some provinces—such as Takhar and Baghlan in the north and Nangahar in the east—but weak in others, the resistance remains disorganized. On Friday, for example, the capital of the southern Nimruz province fell to the Taliban despite local resistance by security forces and civilians. But if the latter are properly led and supported, they may yet become a potent force. For its part, the Taliban is trying to counter this resistance with a combination of military moves and offers to cut deals with power brokers for privileged positions in a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Why air support matters A pivotal element to holding Herat, as well as avoiding the loss of other key cities, effective air support not only boosts the morale of Afghan officials and security forces but also supports intelligence and logistics operations. For the Afghan state, it buys time to recover its balance; for the United States and its allies, it provides space to consider what might still be salvaged after twenty years of development work. This is why the Biden administration must urgently reconsider its decision to end close air support for Afghan forces by August 31. More broadly, the United States needs to work with the Afghans to establish an air force of the size and structure that they need. After all, the slow development of the Afghan air force—though it is now performing well—is partly a US responsibility: While corruption and mismanagement plagued the



Afghan side, the United States also wasted \$549 million on shoddy cargo planes and lost a great deal of time by switching from rebuilt Russian helicopters to more complicated American Blackhawks. Washington also devised a system heavily dependent on support from foreign contractors and then decided to pull those contractors out of Afghanistan as part of the sudden withdrawal. The urgent work ahead must include adequate training and maintenance to keep the Afghan air force flying. Plans and timelines should be realistic and developed with NATO and other allied cooperation and funding. NATO should also renew its commitment to providing its own air support until the Afghan air force is fully built (or peace negotiations are successful). This will spread out the burden and risk. Importantly, the United States should designate a senior Department of Defense official to oversee defense-assistance efforts. Clear-cut policy is key Continued air support, however, is a short-term tactic to avoid defeat—not a policy. Nor is withdrawing US and NATO forces without sufficient planning for what comes next. Supporting negotiations is helpful, but only talking about negotiating while the other side is winning militarily and pushing for surrender

is futile. The US approach should be to prevent the defeat and collapse of the Afghan state until a stalemate can force serious negotiations and a sustainable settlement. A deal that protects the broad spectrum of ethnic and tribal interests, including guarantees protecting the hard-fought gains of Afghan women, will only be possible through these kinds of talks. This is why negotiations should be constantly supported but not allowed to cripple military action, as was the case during the past year when the United States was largely on the defensive. Providing humanitarian assistance is also crucial, as the Taliban's military offensive has displaced tens of thousands of people and pushed Afghanistan toward a humanitarian and refugee crisis. The United States, which now shoulders an even greater responsibility for those left behind amid its withdrawal, should lead an international effort to marshal emergency humanitarian support for those affected by the violence. This could help avoid a potentially massive refugee movement throughout the region and beyond. There is no reason for Americans to turn their backs on the suffering Afghan people—especially when those Afghans are still putting up a fight. Many have adopted the values of freedom, human... **P3**

By: Binoy Kampmark

Afghanistan, Failure and Second Thoughts

It is a country other powers simply cannot leave alone. Even after abandoning its Kabul post in ignominy, tail tucked between their legs, Australia is now wondering if it should return – in some form. The Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs has been sending out a few signals, none of them definitive. “We will not comment on intelligence matters,” a spokesman for foreign minister Senator Marise Payne stated tersely earlier this month. The spokesman was, however, willing to make general remarks about a belated return. When, he could not be sure, but Canberra's diplomatic arrangements in Afghanistan “were always expected to be temporary, with the intention of resuming a permanent presence once circumstances permit.” Australia continued “to engage closely with partners, including the Afghanistan

government and coalition member countries.” Rather embarrassing remarks, given the sudden closure of the embassy on June 18. The Australian response, confused and stumbling, is much like that of their counterparts in Washington. While the Biden administration speeds up the departure of troops, the cord to Kabul remains uncut though distinctly worn. In April, the US House Services Committee was told by General Kenneth “Frank” McKenzie, head of US Central Command, that the Pentagon was “further planning now for continued counterterrorism operations from within the region.” Amanda Dory, acting undersecretary of defense for defense policy, also informed members that the Pentagon remained interested in considering “how to continue to apply pressure with respect to potential threats emanating from

Afghanistan.” Hazily, she claimed that the department was “looking throughout the region in terms of over-the-horizon opportunities.” Such window dressing does little to confront the situation on the ground, which looks monstrously bleak for the increasingly titular Kabul government. General Scott Miller, top US military commander in Afghanistan, clumsily admitted in June that, “Civil war is certainly a path that can be visualized if this continues on the trajectory it's on right now.” The hasty withdrawal from Bagram airbase on July 2 certainly gave the Taliban much scope to visualize that fact. Unceremoniously hung out to dry in the Doha agreement forged by the US and the Taliban, the frail and terminal regime has imposed a month-long countrywide curfew to address the vigorous onslaught. According to the interior ministry,

the curfew is intended “to curb violence and limit the Taliban movements”, though it would not apply to Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar. The US Air Force has also made a dozen airstrikes in southern Afghanistan, concerned by the Taliban's push towards Kandahar, the second-largest city in the country. “The United States has increased airstrikes in support of Afghan security forces in the past several days,” announced General McKenzie. “And we're prepared to continue this heightened level of support in the coming weeks if the Taliban continue their attacks.” Such actions are only band aid measures at best. The surrender of Afghan soldiers to the Taliban across numerous districts is inking the writing on the wall. The response from Kabul is that the Afghan army is behaving strategically, refocusing attention on protecting urban centres. In reality, they have lost

both their mettle and the plot, with the Taliban in control of some 85 per cent of the country's territory, including critical border checkpoints. As a reminder of their emerging dominance, ghoulish material such as video footage showing the execution of 22 elite Afghan commandos, trained by US forces, terrifies government soldiers. But McKenzie is a picture of hope over experience. “The Taliban are attempting to create a sense of inevitability about their campaign. They're wrong. There is no preordained conclusion to this fight.” Other countries are also bubbling with concern, which, when translated into security matters, imply future interference. Russia, bloodied and bruised by its own Afghanistan experience, casts a concerned eye at the Taliban train. “The uncertainty of the development of the military-political situation in this country and around it has... **P3**

UN Registers Three New Cultural Heritages from Afghanistan

The Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan announced that three cultural heritages of the country were registered in the list of world cultural heritage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO. According to the ministry's statement, Behzad's miniature art style will be registered independently under Afghanistan's name by 2022; a silk production industry will be registered jointly under the name of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; and, Yalda night will be jointly registered under the name of Afghanistan and Iran. The registration of these



works was done at the request of the Afghan government and has been accepted by UNESCO.

The Ministry of Information and Culture called the registration of these three works by UNESCO a

great achievement and said that it would spare no effort to protect the country's cultural heritage.

UN: Violence in...

by militant groups in Afghanistan this year. In southern Helmand province, officials said Taliban fighters had seized a local journalist, Nematullah Hemat, from his home in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, on Sunday. "There is just absolutely no clue where the Taliban have taken Hemat...we are really in a state of panic, said Razwan Miakhel, head of private TV channel, Gharghasht TV where Hemat was employed. A Taliban spokesperson told Reuters that he had no information on either the killing in Kabul or the abducted journalist in Helmand. A coalition of Afghan news organizations have written to US President Joe Biden and leaders in the House of Representatives, urging them to grant special immigration visas to Afghan journalists and support staff. The Taliban seized three northern cities over the weekend and were threatening to capture more, ramping up an offensive against Afghan government forces that followed Washington's announcement that it would end its military mission in the country by the end of the month.

Germany Rejects...

Some within her own conservative party want German troops to participate in an intervention against the Taliban, but Kramp-Karrenbauer said defeating them would require a long and hard campaign. Since the United States announced plans in April to pull out troops by Sept. 11, and the transatlantic alliance NATO followed suit, violence has escalated as the Taliban seize territory. Kramp-Karrenbauer blamed former U.S. President Donald Trump for undermining the Afghanistan operation, even though it is his successor Joe Biden implementing the withdrawal policy. "Trump's unfortunate deal with the Taliban was the beginning of the end," she said of an agreement Trump struck with the Islamist militants in 2020 for U.S. troops to leave.

6th Provincial...

Rahmat explained, adding that the forces had lost their morale. Another lawmaker from the constituency said that some 300 fresh troops will be deployed to push the Taliban back from Aybak, home to around 120,833 people. On Sunday, Taliban militants overran three provincial capitals - Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul and Taloqan - within

several hours. The cities of Sheberghan in Jawzjan province and Zaranj in south-western Nimruz province were captured on Friday and Saturday. Taliban fighters have taken more than half of Afghanistan's districts and encircled about a dozen provincial capitals since the U.S.-led international troops began their withdrawal from the country in early May. President

Joe Biden announced earlier that U.S. troops would end their 20-year military intervention in the country by the end of August. NATO has already quietly wrapped up its mission in the country. The peace talks that started between the warring sides in Qatar last year made little progress and have now stalled as both sides speak of war.

Don't Lose...

rights, and political liberalism that the United States has preached for twenty years. Now they seek refuge from death and persecution. Most want to stay and help Afghanistan; the US government must empower them.

Mustering global support Peace, no matter how far off it seems, still needs diplomatic support. With the Doha agreement on the withdrawal of American forces failing to deliver serious Afghan-to-Afghan negotiations, Biden should appoint and support a new US envoy for Afghanistan and the region to reinvigorate diplomacy. The envoy should be complemented by a United Nations (UN) counterpart with the authority to take the lead in working with the Afghan government, the Taliban, and regional players with a strong interest in stability in Afghanistan. These regional powers will not come together on their own, and the United States cannot lead

such a process given its lack of relationship with Iran, a key actor. The United States needs to play a supportive role in this process rather than engaging in independent initiatives. It should also get clear and collective agreement from crucial stakeholders—such as China, Russia, the European Union, the United Kingdom, India, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan—that they will not recognize or provide economic or financial assistance to a Taliban government imposed by force.

Helpfully, the UN Security Council this week issued a strong condemnation of escalating violence, human-rights abuses, and civilian casualties. But UN sanctions on the Taliban should not be lifted and no more Taliban prisoners should be released until the group takes tangible steps to reduce violence and engage in good-faith talks with the Kabul government. The Security Council should urgently consider imposing

new restrictions on the Taliban, including a travel ban, unless such significant steps are taken. The US government also needs to consider the wider impact and long-term effects of its new policy in Afghanistan. The toppling of the government in Kabul would destabilize South Asia—a region dominated by India and Pakistan, two antagonistic, nuclear-armed powers. But above all, an ignominious American departure from the country would send a terrible signal to other countries as the United States competes with China and other authoritarian states. If US security guarantees are not credible, why not cut deals with China?

It is late in the day, but the United States can, and must, act forcefully in Afghanistan with air and defense support along with robust diplomacy. The country's future—as well as Washington's global credibility—is at stake.

Afghanistan...

increased," stated Russia's grave foreign minister Sergey Lavrov earlier this month. "Unfortunately, in recent days we have witnessed a rapid degradation of the situation in Afghanistan." It was "obvious that in the current conditions there are real risks of an overflow of instability to neighboring states." Moscow shares, with Washington, a dark paternalism towards the country. While the Biden administration has shown

less interest of late, Moscow is looking for reassurance against impending chaos. "It is the feeling in Moscow," reasoned Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the Moscow-based Russia in Global Affairs, "that the US is not able to, or even interested in, maintaining a presence in the region to guarantee any particular future direction in Afghanistan." The implications of this are ominous enough. The emptying of the barracks does not put an end to the prying and meddling from

non-Afghan personnel. The country will still host a myriad of special forces and intelligence officials. Excuses for maintaining some militarized footprint will be traditional: the threat posed by terrorism; the thriving opium trade. The contractor business will also boom. A Taliban victory promises a slice of violence for everybody, but so does the presence of this feeble Afghan government.

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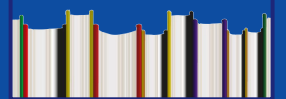
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Russian, Indian Commandos Eliminate Terrorists in Indra-2021 Joint Drills

Troops from Russia and India carried out an anti-terror operation during the Indra-2021 international drills at the Prudboi training ground in the Volgograd Region in Russia's south, the press office of Russia's Southern Military District reported on Monday.

"The personnel of Russia and India conducted an anti-terror operation at the Indra-2021 drills. Under the scenario of the exercise, the troops were assigned the task of eliminating terrorists in a populated area and freeing hostages," the press office said in a statement. During the drills, the commanders of Russian and Indian units drew up a plan of a joint operation and eliminated the notional terrorists by joint efforts, the statement says. In particular, an Indian motorized infantry

company was the first to start accomplishing the tasks. Tanks opened fire against the notional terrorists' positions and a Mi-8 helicopter landed commandos under their cover, the press office specified. "Simultaneously, BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles launched an attack. An assault force of motorized infantry personnel engaged in a battle at close approaches to the locality, mopping up houses. Meanwhile, the Indian commandos launched an assault on buildings, descending with the help of ropes on the roofs. Following this, a reinforced motor rifle company of the Southern Military District started accomplishing assigned tasks," the press office said.



A look at the world

UN Chief Repeats Call for Calm on Lebanon-Israel Border

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres repeated his call on Sunday for calm on the Lebanon-Israel border. "The secretary-general expresses his deep concern about the recent escalation between Lebanon and Israel across the Blue Line, including rocket fire into Israel and return airstrikes and artillery fire into Lebanon," said Guterres' press office in a note to correspondents. The Blue Line is a border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel published by the United Nations in 2000. The secretary-general calls on all parties to exercise utmost restraint and to actively engage with the liaison and coordination mechanisms of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon,



said the press office. "It is paramount that all actors involved avoid actions that can further heighten tensions and lead to miscalculation." Guterres made a similar call on Friday.

The latest escalation came as Lebanon is struggling both politically and economically, one year after the devastating Beirut Port blast. However, Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition overnight destroyed at least five pick-up vehicles carrying combatants of the Houthi militia in Yemen's central province of Marib, a military source told Xinhua on Monday. "The vehicles were destroyed in and around the frontline of the southwestern district of Rahabah, killing all aboard," the source in Marib said on condition of anonymity. "Despite the airstrikes, the Houthis continue their attempts to retake strategic mountains in the district," said the source without elaborating further. Meanwhile, the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV reported six Saudi-led airstrikes on Rahabah and the western district of Sirwah without providing more details. Early on Monday, the Saudi-led coalition said it intercepted and destroyed two bomb-laden drones launched by the Houthis from Yemen towards the Saudi southern city of Khamis Mushait. There was no comment yet from the Houthi group. The Houthis began in February a major offensive on Marib in an attempt to seize control of the oil-rich province, the government's last northern stronghold.

Iran Urges U.S. to Quit Pressure Policy



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday that the U.S. administration should give up the pressure policy pursued by former U.S. President Donald Trump. Saeed Khatibzadeh said at his weekly press conference that the U.S. administration should realize that it will not gain anything related to the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, known also as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), if it adheres to Trump's mentality. The United States needs to change its approach and considers the realities on the ground, Khatibzadeh said, adding that Trump's policy of maximum pressure has failed. Asked about the pause in Vienna talks on the revival of JCPOA, he said that Iran was busy with the transition of administration recently and new President Ebrahim Raisi will decide on the process of negotiations. Anti-Iran sanctions should be lifted, Khatibzadeh said, adding that "Iran would not accept anything less than the JCPOA" which resulted in the removal of western sanctions on Iran in 2015. Trump withdrew from the 2015 agreement in May 2018 and unilaterally re-imposed old and new sanctions on Iran. In response, Iran has gradually stopped implementing parts of its commitments to the deal since May 2019. After six rounds of talks in Vienna since April, the parties said serious differences remain between Iran and the United States for the revitalization of the deal. The sixth round of talks ended on June 20, with the talks currently on hiatus.

Nearly \$2M Collected in A Single Day for Turkey's Forest Fires

As forest fires continue threatening Turkey, countries have lined up to offer their condolences, messages of solidarity and airplanes to help the country fight the fires. Meanwhile, the Chairperson of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu said in a statement that a fund drive has been officially approved to collect money after legal applications. Noting that the nation has unified in the wake of the forest fires, Hisarcıklioğlu added



that they collected a sum of TL 15.5 million (over \$1.7 million) in a single day. "No matter what their political views are, people have united for a cause," he said. Meanwhile, Turkish Red Crescent volunteers surprised two Azerbaijani soldiers with birthday cakes to boost their morale. The 25-year-old Nifteliev Yusif and 32-year-old Hemidli Behram went to the Turkish Red Crescent coordination center in southwestern Muğla province's Menteşe district to speak to their families over video call. Upon learning about their birthdays, Turkish Red Crescent volunteers surprised the two with birthday cakes complete with lit candles. The Menteşe branch chairperson of Turkish Red Crescent Kenan Gürbüz said in a statement that Turkey is grateful to the Azerbaijani people for their efforts to extinguish the fires. "These birthday celebrations have been a rare opportunity to smile during these trying times," he said.



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