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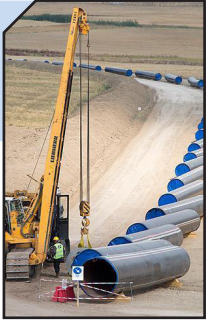
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Balkh
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Afghanistan-China Strengthen Economic, Transit Ties

Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Public Works, Mullah Mohammad Isa Sani, met with Chinese Ambassador Zhao Xing in Kabul to discuss expanding economic and transit cooperation between the two countries. According to a statement from the Ministry of Public Works, Sani highlighted the strong social, economic, and political ties between Afghanistan and China, expressing appreciation for Beijing's continued support. The talks also focused on the Wakhan Corridor, a key trade route linking the two nations. Sani noted that the Ministry has completed the corridor's survey, and design work is now underway.



IEA Urges the US to Hand Over 7 Helicopters to Afghans

In response to the transfer of seven helicopters of the former Afghan army from Uzbekistan to the US, the Ministry of National Defense has urged Washington not to create any obstacles in returning these helicopters to Afghanistan and to hand them over to the Afghans, the ministry said in a statement on Saturday. The statement stated: "The Islamic Emirate is concerned about this issue, because these helicopters belong to Afghanistan, and were moved to Uzbekistan when the officials of the previous administration escaped, thus they should be returned to Afghanistan." "It is unacceptable for us that these helicopters are being transferred to the United States for any reason; because the people of Afghanistan have the right to defend and question their rights, along with neighboring countries must also respect the rights of Afghans," the statement read.

UN Security Council to Convene on Daesh Threats Stemming from Afghanistan and the Region



The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is set to hold a special meeting on Monday to assess the threats posed by ISIS. During the meeting, members will review a six-month report by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, which identifies ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) as a serious

threat originating from Afghanistan. The report highlights recent ISIS attacks and suggests that these assaults may have been carried out to undermine the "Taliban's" achievements in ensuring security. A section of the UN Secretary-General's report states: "The report says that ISIL-K supporters

have plotted attacks in Europe, including in France, where authorities arrested an 18-year-old who planned to carry out an attack on French soil in July 2024. It also highlights the 11 December 2024 ISIL-K suicide bombing that killed Taliban Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Khalil Ahmed

Haqqani, noting that it may have been an attempt to undermine the Taliban's claims regarding its ability to maintain security in Afghanistan." Although the Islamic Emirate has not officially commented on the report, it has previously denied that Afghan territory poses any threat to other countries.

Kamran Aman, a military analyst, stated: "These are proxy and intelligence-backed groups hired under the name of ISIS by foreign countries. Their goal is to target Afghans and foreign nationals to achieve their own strategic objectives."

Another military analyst, Zalmay Afghan-Yar, emphasized the importance of international cooperation in combating terrorism: "When a matter reaches the UN Security Council, it becomes a global issue. If Afghanistan is dealing with terrorism, why doesn't the world collaborate with Afghanistan to ensure this fight is carried out effectively?"

The UNSC meeting on ISIS threats comes as the Islamic Emirate has previously claimed that ISIS operates under Pakistani jurisdiction, citing available evidence.

Iranian Envoy Predicts Strengthened Relations with Afghanistan in the Coming Year

Alireza Bikdeli, acting Iran's ambassador in Kabul, stated in an interview with TOLONews that Iran, following its neighborhood policy, is working to enhance relations with Afghanistan in various sectors.

Bikdeli emphasized that expanding economic ties with Afghanistan is a priority for Tehran. According to available figures, Iran has conducted over \$2 billion in trade with Afghanistan in the past nine months. He also... P3



Trump Criticizes Biden Administration for Leaving Weapons Behind in Afghanistan

US President Donald Trump said on Friday it was "stupid" for the Biden administration to abandon military equipment worth billions of dollars in Afghanistan.

Trump said at a joint press conference with the Japanese prime minister at the White House on Friday that there was no reason to leave military equipment in Afghanistan.

"I want our military to be the strongest. I also don't mind spending so much money on the military because we build it here, made in the USA. All made in the USA. I rebuilt our military during my first term, did a great job. We left some of it behind in Afghanistan stupidly. There was no reason for that," Trump said.

Trump has repeatedly criticized the abandonment of military



equipment in Afghanistan. Trump said before his inauguration last month that future financial aid to Afghanistan would be contingent upon the return of US military

equipment. The Islamic Emirate, however, has said the equipment now belongs to Afghanistan and would not be handed over to the US.

Iran Ready...

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes and denies any intention to develop atomic weapons. The US president, however, reinstated on Tuesday his "maximum pressure" policy, with Washington on Thursday announcing financial sanctions on entities and individuals accused of shipping hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of Iranian crude oil to China. Aragchi said on Saturday that "Iran does not want to negotiate with a country that is simultaneously imposing new sanctions".

China Can Play...

companies operating in Egypt are adding great value to the Egyptian economy. "I hope that cooperation between the two countries will expand in the technical aspect regarding future industries and artificial intelligence, so that it contributes to the renaissance of the Egyptian economy in all its aspects," Abou El-Enein said. He also pointed out that China is now helping Egypt in localizing the automobile industry by opening automobile factories in the country. "China can take advantage of Egypt's geographical location as a link between Africa and Europe," he said, adding that "China will also benefit from the agreements signed between Egypt and many countries in the region and in Europe, which opens new markets for Chinese products manufactured in Egypt."

By: CGTN

Asian Leaders Gather in Harbin for 2025 Asian Winter Games Opening Ceremony, Stress Regional Cooperation

As China enters the Year of the Snake, the country welcomes leaders from four Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Brunei and Thailand. Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with them separately over the past few days, before the four leaders gathered in northeast China's Harbin to attend the opening ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games on Friday. With the theme of "Dream of Winter, Love among Asia," the 9th Asian Winter Games were declared open by Xi at the opening ceremony. Bridge for cultural exchange It is the third time China is staging the winter continental games, having previously held the 1996 Harbin Asian Winter Games and the 2007 Changchun Asian Winter Games. It is also another major comprehensive international winter sports event held by China after the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Since winning the bid for the Games in July 2023, Harbin's preparations have been in full swing. According to the organizers, over 1,200 athletes from 34 countries and regions across Asia will compete, making this edition the largest in terms of participating delegations and athletes. "Fantastic! Very good," Olympic Council of Asia Director General Husain Al-Musallam told CGTN when he talked about Harbin's preparations for the Games, noting that he wishes that the fantastic facility, the hospitality and the nice climate will help the athletes enjoy their competition and improve their standards. The Asian Winter Games in Harbin have emerged as a powerful bridge for culture exchange



across Asia, serving as a universal language that transcends borders, said Supitr Samahito, vice president of the Thai Olympic Committee, in an earlier interview. She praised China's expertise in hosting major sporting events, noting that it has raised expectations for the Harbin Games. "The Asian Winter Games are not just a sporting event but also a unique opportunity for Asian countries and regions to showcase their cultures and deepen mutual understanding." "The slogan of the 9th Asian Winter Games embodies the vision of deepening connections across Asia through winter sports," said Mitsuya Yuko, vice president of the Japanese Olympic Committee. "It is hoped that the power of sports can reconnect people closely and promote communication and mutual

understanding," she added.

Win-win cooperation

During Xi's talks with leaders of the four countries, cooperation has been a notable keyword. In his talks with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, Xi called on both sides to create new drivers for growth by expanding cooperation on cross-border e-commerce, big data and artificial intelligence. When meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Xi said China appreciates Pakistan's active support for the three global initiatives and participation in relevant cooperation mechanisms, adding that China is ready to deepen practical cooperation with Pakistan in various fields and work together to upgrade China-Pakistan Economic Corridor cooperation.

During his talks with Brunei's Sultan

Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, Xi called on the two sides to build the China-Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area and the New Land-Sea Corridor as dual hubs. Noting that China appreciates Thailand's effective measures against online gambling and telecom fraud, Xi said that both sides should continue to strengthen law enforcement, security and judicial cooperation to safeguard the safety of people's lives and property as well as the orderly exchanges and cooperation among regional countries in his talks with Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra. A number of bilateral cooperation documents were signed following separate talks between Xi and each of the leaders.

Editorial

Retired Civil Servants Urgently Need Government Attention

One of the major shortcomings in the long-standing policies of Afghan governments has been the failure to provide timely and adequate attention to the rights of retired civil servants. These are individuals who dedicated the best years of their lives to serving the country's institutions, educational centers, military services, and other governmental sectors. However, now, in the final stages of their lives, they face numerous financial, health, and social challenges. For years, they contributed to strengthening Afghanistan's administration and development, setting examples of honesty and commitment in the fields of security, education, economy, and more. Yet, now that they are no longer capable of active service, they are deprived of their rightful entitlements. Many retired Afghan civil servants struggle to meet their

basic needs and live under harsh economic conditions.

The Afghan caretaker government is responsible for ensuring these individuals receive their rightful benefits. This is not only a moral and legal obligation but also a fundamental requirement of a just and civilized system. The pensions of government employees are a portion of the funds they contributed through various taxes and deductions during their employment. Therefore, paying these pensions is not just their legitimate right but also a duty of the state.

At present, although Afghanistan is facing economic difficulties, such challenges cannot justify the neglect of retirees' rights. The government must establish a transparent and systematic mechanism to provide financial support to retired civil servants, ensuring that... **P3**

By: Zhang Yuying and Wang Wenwen

Trump, Ishiba Mention China in their meeting; Passivity Seen in Japanese Position in US alliance: experts

US President Donald Trump and visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba held their first official meeting in Washington DC on Friday. Ishiba became the first Asian leader to do so in Trump's second term, according to the Washington Post. He is also Trump's first meeting with the leader of a key US ally in Asia. At the joint press conference on Friday, Trump claimed he and Ishiba "agreed to cooperate even more closely to combat the Chinese economic aggression," the POLITICO reported. In the joint statement released by the two sides, they repeated their old tune by hyping up issues related to the East China Sea and the South China Sea, claiming the two leader's opposition to "any attempts by China to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea." Chinese experts believed that this

prioritizes the US-Japan alliance over regional security and economic stability, and also demonstrates Japan's passivity in the alliance relationship. Sun Jiashen, an assistant researcher at the Institute of Japanese Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Saturday that this move is primarily directed toward the Taiwan Straits and the East China Sea. The two leaders claimed that they would increase "bilateral presence in Japan's Southwest Islands," read the statement.

"Japan's maneuver, which aligns with the US' China containment strategy, ultimately restricts Japan's strategic autonomy," Sun noted. After Ishiba became the Japanese prime minister, he has been trying to explore a diversified diplomatic approach, including improving

relations with China and enhancing bilateral cooperation. Before his visit to the US, Ishiba had hinted his willingness to visit China as early as possible, Kyodo News reported on January 31. Regarding China-Japan relations, Ishiba was quoted by Nikkei Asia in December 2024 as saying that bilateral ties must remain stable.

Ishiba also pledged to enhance communication with China and comprehensively advance the strategic relationship of mutual benefits between the two countries, the Xinhua News Agency reported on January 28.

Meanwhile, Hiroshi Moriyama, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party and Makoto Nishida, secretary-general of the Komeito Party of Japan led a delegation of the ruling parties of Japan to visit China in... **P3**

Turkmenistan's president Orders Acceleration of TAPI Gas Pipeline Construction

Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov has instructed his government to accelerate the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and intensify the development of the Galkynysh gas field, local media reported.

During an extended government meeting, Berdimuhamedov emphasized the importance of the Serhetabat-Herat section of the pipeline, referred to as "Arkadagyň ak ýoly" (The Protector's White Road). He also highlighted the need to develop promising oil fields to strengthen the country's energy sector. The President underscored that Turkmenistan's energy policy for 2025 will focus on modernizing the oil and gas industry to ensure reliable natural gas supplies to domestic and international markets. To this end, he called for the adoption of advanced technologies to boost the production capacity of the oil and gas complex.

The construction of the TAPI gas pipeline,



which began in 2015, aims to transport 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually over a distance of more than 1,800 kilometers. The pipeline will run through the Afghan cities of Herat and Kandahar, the Pakistani cities of Quetta and Multan, and terminate near Fazilka, at the Pakistani-Indian border.

Turkmen gas, the state-owned energy company, has already completed a 214-kilometer section of the pipeline in Turkmenistan, which is now ready for operation. In December 2024, construction activities for the Afghan segment of the pipeline officially began, signaling a critical step

toward realizing the multi-nation project.

The successful completion of TAPI is expected to enhance regional energy connectivity, delivering economic benefits to all participating countries while meeting growing energy demands across South Asia.

Retired Civil...

every pensioner receives their due payments on time. Failing to deliver these pensions not only exacerbates the financial hardships of these individuals but also discourages those currently working in government institutions. This situation leads to a decline in the quality of public administration, reduced commitment among employees, and the loss of valuable human resources. The non-payment of pensions to retired civil servants has long-term negative consequences for society. If the government continuously fails to recognize the value of its employees' efforts, it will increase distrust toward public institutions among future generations. Young people may lose interest in government jobs, as witnessing the struggles of pension-deprived retirees may lead them to prefer opportunities in the private sector or consider migration instead. The Afghan caretaker government must take concrete steps to address this issue. First, the process of pension distribution must be made transparent, with a clear schedule for those still awaiting their payments. Second, the state pension fund must be strengthened to ensure that pension payments are made regularly and on time. Third, the government should identify sustainable economic resources to finance the pension system and establish a mechanism that guarantees its stability. In conclusion, the Afghan caretaker government must urgently prioritize the rights of its retired civil servants, take practical measures to resolve their issues, and reassure them that they have not been forgotten by the state. Failure to act on this matter will lead to the deterioration of public institutions, increased employee dissatisfaction, and greater social challenges. The government must take immediate steps to resolve this crisis.

Iranian Envoy...

noted that Iran has taken significant steps to facilitate trade and cultural exchanges between the two countries. The Iranian envoy further stated: "Despite the determination of high-ranking officials from both countries to strengthen relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan within the framework of neighborhood diplomacy, the coming year, God willing, will be more successful in advancing mutual interests." Regarding the long-standing issue of water rights between

Afghanistan and Iran, Bikdeli asserted that recent discussions between the two sides have led to a resolution.

He elaborated: "During the recent visit of the Foreign Minister, Afghan officials reaffirmed their commitment to the treaty and expressed their willingness to address water-related challenges in Sistan and Baluchestan with an Islamic and fraternal approach."

Additionally, Bikdeli praised Afghanistan's ban on opium cultivation and drug trafficking, affirming Iran's readiness to

collaborate in countering drug smuggling and terrorism.

"The fight against terrorism and extremism is a key area of cooperation between our countries. At present, both nations are working together in combating terrorism," he said.

Bikdeli's remarks on expanding ties with Afghanistan come amid ongoing tensions over Iran's water rights from Afghanistan and the periodic deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran, which have occasionally strained relations between the two neighbors.

Trump, Ishiba...

January, during which the two sides held the 9th meeting of China-Japan ruling parties exchange mechanism. Analysts believed these interactions have provided room for the improvement of China-Japan relations.

Ishiba's visit to the US comes at a time when the world is still watching how Trump's foreign policy will unfold in his second term. The visit is both an attempt by Japan to navigate its position in the context of the China-US competition and a concession to Trump's transactional diplomacy, Sun said.

When meeting with Ishiba on Friday, Trump said he wants to slash the US trade deficit with Japan, AP reported. Trump also noted that "chronic" trade deficits harm the US economy and that he will not tolerate the deficit with Japan to stay as it is, according to Nikkei.

The Washington Post took it as a hint by Trump that "Japan could soon face US tariffs if it doesn't take steps to buy more

from the US."

Coincidentally, Trump said on Friday that he plans to announce reciprocal tariffs on many countries by early next week.

Meanwhile, Trump pushed Japan to invest in US energy and technology. According to the POLITICO, Trump seemed appeased by Ishiba's announcement that his country would seek to invest another \$1 trillion in the US, along with his agreement to help resolve the US Steel transaction to benefit both countries.

Sun told the Global Times that the US' attitude toward its ally Japan is also reflected in the deal of Japan's Nippon Steel acquiring US Steel. Trump in December said he was "totally against the once great and powerful US Steel being bought by a foreign company." On Friday when meeting with Ishiba, Trump announced that Nippon Steel was dropping its \$14.1 billion acquisition of US Steel and would instead be making an "investment,

rather than a purchase," a move apparently fits into the pocket of the US. Sun believes that although the two leaders affirmed their determination to pursue a "new golden age" for US-Japan relations, such an era remains distant.

Yang Zhen, a deputy director of Northeast Asia Research Center of Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, told the Global Times on Saturday that Japan's military provocations against China are unlikely to succeed, and as China makes strides in emerging industries such as new energy and artificial intelligence, Japan will suffer from significant economic losses should it opt for confrontation with China.

Japan should adopt a pragmatic approach to promote dialogue between China and Japan, avoiding bloc-based conflicts. Only by adhering to open cooperation can Japan break the shackles of zero-sum games and pave new paths for stability in East Asia and globally, Yang said.

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Iran Ready to Negotiate With US But Not Under Maximum Pressure

Iran was ready to negotiate with the United States but not under the “maximum pressure” strategy of US President Donald Trump, Tehran’s chief diplomat suggested on Saturday.

“The lifting of sanctions requires negotiations, but not within the framework of a ‘maximum pressure’ policy, because it would not be a negotiation but a form of surrender,” said Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a statement published on Telegram.

The foreign minister’s statement came after Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged the government not to negotiate with Washington, calling such an approach “reckless”.



Khamenei, who has the final say on all strategic decisions in Iran, referred to Iran’s previous experience negotiating with the United States to justify his position.

In 2015, Iran struck a landmark deal with the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia to regulate its nuclear programme in return for the easing of international sanctions.

However, in 2018, during his first term, Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the agreement and reinstated heavy sanctions on Tehran, despite European opposition.

Trump on Wednesday called for a “verified nuclear peace agreement” with Iran, adding that it “cannot have a nuclear weapon... P2

A look at the world

Israel frees 183 Palestinian Prisoners Under Gaza Ceasefire Deal

Israel released 183 Palestinian prisoners on Saturday in the fifth prisoner-for-hostage swap under the ongoing ceasefire agreement with Hamas.

Abdullah al-Zaghari, head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, said the released prisoners, transported by buses of the International Committee of the Red Cross, had arrived in Ramallah. TV footage showed the released Palestinians being greeted by a large crowd at a square in the city. Of the freed prisoners, 42 were from the West Bank, three from Jerusalem, and 27 from the Gaza Strip, all serving life sentences or lengthy terms. Additionally, 111 prisoners were arrested in the Gaza Strip after Hamas’ surprise attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the Commission of Detainees’ Affairs said in a press statement.

Seven of the freed prisoners would be deported outside the Palestinian territories, according to the statement. Palestinian security sources and eyewitnesses said that Israeli vehicles stormed Beitunia, a Palestinian city west of Ramallah, immediately after the bus carrying Palestinian prisoners left Ofer Prison, to prevent any celebratory demonstrations by their families.

Israeli forces also raided the homes of some prisoners in the West Bank and warned their families against organizing celebrations to mark their release, according to the sources. Earlier on Saturday, Hamas released three Israeli hostages it had been holding in the Gaza Strip. The Israel Defense Forces said in a statement that the Israeli hostages had crossed the border into Israel. This release marks the fifth hostage-prisoner swap



under the first phase of a ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel, brokered by Egypt and Qatar with support from the United States.

According to a report by the Times of Israel last month, Israel demanded that Palestinians convicted of the most serious crimes not be released to the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.

China Can Play major Role in Egypt’s 2024-2030 Industrial Strategy: MP

China can play a major role in boosting Egypt’s industrial strategy for 2024-2030, Deputy Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament Mohamed Abou El-Enein said on Saturday.

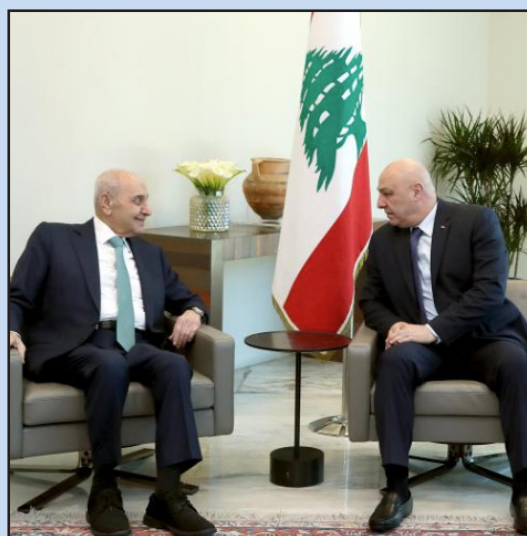
“China is a key industrial partner and can definitely play a major role in making Egypt’s

industrial strategy a success,” Abou El-Enein told Xinhua on the sidelines of the 11th Akhbar El Youm economic conference in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

He highlighted China’s support for Egypt across various industrial sectors, noting that many prominent Chinese



Lebanon Announces Formation of New Gov’t



The Lebanese Presidency announced Saturday the formation of a new 24-member government headed by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam.

According to local TV channel al-Jadeed, Salam told reporters at the presidential palace that the new government will be reform-driven, which is the only path to saving Lebanon.

The government will implement the 1989 Taif Agreement that ended the civil war in Lebanon, enact financial and economic reforms, and ensure an independent judiciary, he said.

“The government must ensure security and stability by implementing (UN) Resolution 1701 and overseeing Israel’s withdrawal, in parallel with reconstruction efforts. This is not just a promise; it is a commitment,” Salam said.

The government will also work to restore confidence between Lebanon and the international community, and rebuild trust between it and the youth, he said, noting that he will work closely with President Joseph Aoun “to launch a national reconstruction initiative for Lebanon.”

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