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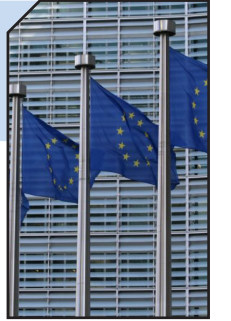
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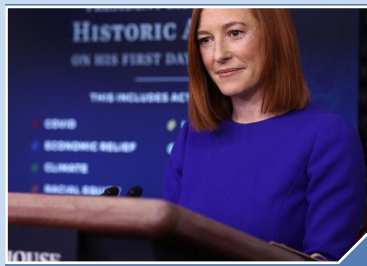
Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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Full Withdrawal from Afghanistan Will Be Tough: White House

The full withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan by May 1 will be difficult due to logistical reasons, said Jennifer Rene Psaki, the White House press secretary in a briefing on Monday.

Psaki in the press conference at the White House said that the US President Joe Biden had also spoken about the problems and expectations regarding the troop pullout from Afghanistan.

“As the President had said before, it will be tough to meet the May 1 deadline for full withdrawal, for logistical reasons. We are continuing — he’s continuing — to consult internally with his national security team and advisors and, of course, also with our partners and allies,” she told reporters.

When asked about US troops and their families who are interested to know what the President’s decision will be ... **P2**



Lavrov in Pakistan for talks that will include Afghan peace process

More focus will be given to Russia and Pakistan’s cooperation to push for a political solution to the Afghan conflict during Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s scheduled visit Islamabad on Tuesday.

Lavrov will be in Pakistan with 13-member delegation including, Russian special envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov; Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova and several other senior officials, for two days to discuss bilateral and regional matters.

A meeting of the extended Troika was hosted by Russia including representatives of the Taliban, Afghan government and other Afghan political leaders two weeks ago. The extended troika, comprising representatives of Russia, China, US and Pakistan, focused on making progress in intra-Afghan peace process to reach a negotiated settlement and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. ... **P3**

Khalilzad Shared Date of Turkey Summit with Delegates



US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad sent a letter to negotiators representing the Afghan republic and the Taliban specifying the date for the Turkey conference on Afghanistan, sources in Qatar said. The sources said that a political consensus for an early solution to the Afghanistan crisis, the establishment of a shared

government and a regional and international consensus will be the main parts of the agenda at the Turkey summit.

The sources said that Khalilzad shared the details of the Turkey conference with both teams of negotiators in Doha after multilateral meetings held in Qatar to unify the summit agenda failed

to result in any tangible progress. But the two sides of delegates have so far have not commented on receiving the details on the Turkey summit agenda from Zalmay Khalilzad.

Multilateral meetings have been underway in Doha for less than two weeks in which representatives of the Afghan republic, the Taliban,

UN, US, Turkey and Qatar have held talks on the Istanbul conference. Sources said that the details of the agenda handed to the negotiators will be made public if they are accepted by the two sides.

“Efforts led by Dr. Khalilzad are underway to create a regional, international and internal consensus in Kabul so that it will change Turkey into a summit that opens the way for settlement,” university lecturer Faiz Mohammad Zaland said.

Some negotiators said that efforts are still underway to unify the agenda of the summit.

“Talks are underway between representatives of the UN and countries supporting the Turkey conference with the two delegations and the meetings of the working groups to unify views,” said Ghulam Farooq Majroh, a member of the Afghan republic’s negotiating team.

A former Afghan intelligence official said that the lack of an internal consensus and the lack of a unified stance among Afghans in the peace process have affected the people’s capacity to make a decision regarding the process. ... **P3**

Afghanistan Food Festival Held in India

A ten-day food and craft festival was organized by the Consulate General of Afghanistan in Hyderabad to promote culture, trade and mutual relationship between New Delhi and Kabul.

“We aim to strengthen cultural and trade ties between India and Afghanistan. To promote mutual interest of both nations, we’ve arranged traders’ meet and workshops,” said Muhammad Suleman Kakar, Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Hyderabad.

The main purpose of conducting such festivals is to expand the trade and business between the two ... **P2**



Karzai calls on Taliban to embrace the ‘new Afghanistan’

As the May 1 deadline for the US troop withdrawal nears, and efforts to secure a peace deal are ramped up, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai said the country is asking the Taliban to embrace today’s Afghanistan, a progressive modern Republic with democratic institutions.

In an interview with TRT World, on Monday, Karzai said: “We (Afghans) are asking the Taliban to become [open to progress]; we have examples of Muslim countries that are doing extremely well, that are deeply Muslim, deeply believing, yet very progressive, quite in touch with the rest of the world, quite in competition positively with the rest of the world.”

“Turkey is one such example and perhaps the best example. Look at the mosques in Turkey, it’s full of people when the prayer time comes, and look at the modernity and the



industrial and cultural and economic output that Turkey gives to itself and to the rest of the world. It is a great model for Afghanistan.”

“We also have other examples in the Muslim world but the best for us is Turkey. We have Indonesia, we have Malaysia, we have others therefore yes it is possible for a Muslim individual for a Muslim society to be

deeply believing, practicing Muslim and yet progressive, enlightened and futuristically oriented.”

On the issue of the withdrawal of US and foreign troops by May 1, or an extension of their stay, Karzai said this must be carried out in a responsible manner so as to make sure it is done in coordination with major powers and countries ... **P3**

Full Withdrawal...

and what more does he need before he can make or announce this decision, Psaki said, "The issues have been conveyed clearly to our partners as well. But in terms of what's next, the president will take some time to make a decision."

Previously, the US President Joe Biden in his first press conference since taking office, had said that it was "very difficult" for "technical reasons" to see the withdrawal of US troops by May 1, but stressed on the fact that the US did not intend to stay in Afghanistan for long.

A few days later, US intelligence agencies warned the President Joe Biden administration that if US forces withdrew from Afghanistan without a peace agreement and a power-sharing deal between the involved parties in the war, "Taliban fighters could take over Afghanistan in two to three years". Following the US President's remarks, the Afghan National Security Council responded by saying that "the lives of foreigners in Afghanistan are safe after the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, but Afghans are still being killed".

Afghanistan Food... countries.

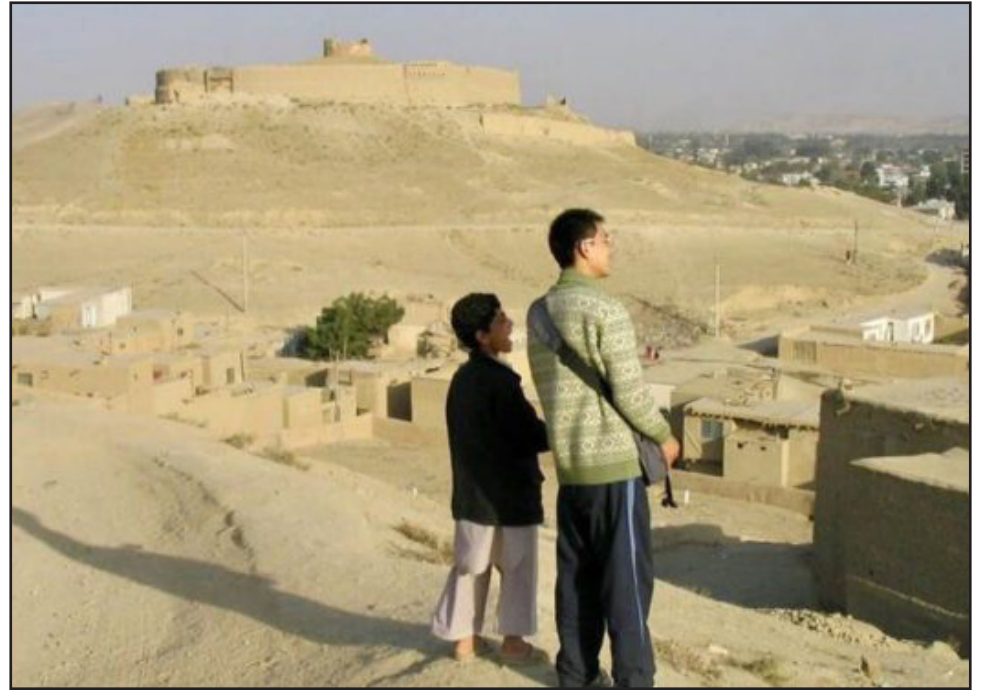
"As a part of the festival, we are conducting a traders meeting on April 6th, 2021, where buyers and sellers come together to have a look at the traders who have come from Afghanistan to display their products. And the following day we will be having a world interactive workshop will be conducted for the development of import and exports between Afghanistan and India, thus promoting the mutual interests of both the countries," he said.

By XiMeng

Ahmad, Are You Fine Now?

In the autumn of 2003, I went to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, alone. At that time, the hot war in Afghanistan had just come to an end, and the situation in the capital Kabul was relatively stable. But the damage caused by the war to this country was still profound and could be seen everywhere. There are deserted houses, dilapidated cars, and highly vigilant foreign soldiers on armored vehicles. During this trip to Afghanistan, what I have never forgotten, is a boy about 10-year old called Ahmad. The great contrast between kindness, innocence and poverty, suffering on him always breaks into my mind from time to time.

That was my first trip to Afghanistan, and I was full of curiosity about this magical country. In my free time, I just wandered around the hotel where I lived. Because of unfamiliarity, I couldn't find the way back after turning on the nearby hillside for a long time. At this time, Ahmad appeared. He was small and a little weak and his clothes were thin. He offered a helping hand to me and took me directly to the entrance of the hotel. On the way back, he introduced me about the nearby buildings and scenery while asking me many questions about China, and he answered my questions from time to time. I learned that he and his family had fled to Pakistan to escape the war, and had just returned to Kabul in 2002. At that time, there was almost nothing in his family. The six members of the family were supported by his father's meager income from driving a taxi. This taxi was a much more than a second-hand and worn-out sedan, and nobody knows how many years it had been driven and how it was imported into Afghanistan. It was a pity that this child had not been to school in any official form. My conversation with him was interesting but short. What's even more regrettable is that more than 10 years have passed. I don't know what the young man is doing now. Has he got enrolled in school? Has he got a job? Has he married? Has



he had a child? Is his son called Little Ahmad? If the answer is "yes", I think this would be one of the best endings I have imagined about him. Displacement and poverty caused by war could be seen everywhere in Afghanistan at that time. The low enrollment rate and child mortality rate caused by poverty were even more shocking. But as stated in the white paper "Poverty Reduction of Humankind in China", poverty is not destined, and poverty is not invincible. Poverty is a chronic disease of human society and a common challenge facing the whole world. China is the largest developing country in the world with a population of 1.4 billion. It had a weak foundation and unbalanced development, and had been plagued by poverty for a long time. China's achievements in poverty reduction have contributed to the world's poverty reduction and have also injected confidence into the Afghan people. The people of both countries are peace-loving, hardworking and courageous people. If

the Chinese could, the Afghans can do the same. Moreover, the Chinese government and people are very willing to share their poverty reduction experience.

In addition, according to a World Bank research report, China's joint construction of the "Belt and Road" initiative will lift 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty and 32 million people out of moderate poverty in relevant countries. This includes our neighbor Afghanistan. I think in the near future, the young boys and girls in Afghanistan will no longer drop out of school because of poverty, will no longer wander in a foreign land because of poverty, and will not take the burden of raising their families prematurely because of poverty. Living a good life is a basic human need and right. This is the primary human right understood by most Chinese too.

(Xi Meng, Senior Researcher, Research Center for the Belt and Road of Lanzhou University)

By Daniel Larison

Get Out of Afghanistan!

The twentieth anniversary of the start of the U.S. war in Afghanistan is only six months away, and it is still uncertain whether the Biden administration will withdraw the last remaining American troops from America's longest war. Last month, President Biden seemed to pour cold water on the possibility of leaving by the agreed-upon May 1 deadline, but also added that "we are not staying a long time." Given how long the war has dragged on and how intense the resistance to withdrawal is in Washington, it is hard to believe that US forces will finally exit Afghanistan this year. The administration's apparent unwillingness to remove the remaining troops on time is a bad sign that they will find some pretext to keep thousands of Americans in harm's way in a war that the US lost long ago.

If Biden fails to pull out by the May 1 deadline, he will take ownership of the war and US forces will come under attack again. There is no good excuse for putting US troops at risk for another six months, and

nothing will change between now and November that makes withdrawal then any "safer" or more "orderly" than it would be if the withdrawal happened in a few weeks. Allowing a delay in the withdrawal will encourage hawks to agitate for more delay and to urge Biden to send more troops to support the troops that are coming under fire. The president says that it will be "tough" to exit Afghanistan by May 1, but he bears the blame for that because of his own foot-dragging. Had the Biden administration acted swiftly to honor the Doha Agreement, the withdrawal could have already been underway by now, but thanks to redundant consultations and reviews the time needed to complete the withdrawal has been all but frittered away.

Previous presidents have refused to make the necessary decision to withdraw because they have not wanted to be accused of "losing" Afghanistan, but Biden needs to recognize and publicly acknowledge that the war could not be won once the US

set such unrealistic goals for itself. The US was never going to have the political will to outlast the Taliban, because sooner or later the US was going to leave and they aren't going anywhere. The public has no appetite for escalation, and a large majority of Americans wants US troops out. Support for withdrawal is strongest among veterans and their families, who have borne the burden of this war and have the largest stake in it. Ignoring majority opinion to continue an unwinnable war is a perfect example of the lack of democratic accountability in our foreign policy. Biden has an opportunity to put himself on the right side of public opinion and to do what is in the best interests of the country, but he must be willing to ignore the carping from foreign policy establishment figures and hawkish pundits.

Opponents of withdrawal warn that the departure of US and allied forces would lead to the Taliban's defeat of the Afghan government's forces. That is true, and it speaks volumes about ...

P3

Ghani: Int'l Community Must Guarantee, Ensure Prolonged Peace

In a Facebook post, Presidential Palace (Arg) said that President Ghani held a meeting with elders from various provinces in regards to unacceptable violence and bloodshed in the country.

President Ghani stressed that "international community" must guarantee by ensuring peace and end of war.

Any political decisions decision President Ghani makes will be based on the country's constitution.

President Ghani wants a just and prolonged peace in the country, the government has planned to shape an independent, democratic and united Afghanistan.

Republic negotiators reported progress made in multilateral meetings over the past few days for the upcoming conference in Turkey. The meetings have focused on the agenda of the conference in Istanbul, which is expected to significantly change the direction of the ongoing peace efforts in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, reports indicated that multilateral meetings on the upcoming Turkey summit are underway, the meetings are focused on the preparation of the agenda for the conference.

The meeting is expected to bring a change to the ongoing peace efforts in Afghanistan. According to TOLONews, some agreements were made on the context and scope of the



Istanbul summit, US, Republic, Taliban, UN, and Qatar negotiators indicated.

This comes as senior political leaders, and government officials are busy reviewing over 25 peace proposals including President Ghani's roadmap for peace.

This committee works under the High Council for National Reconciliation and is led by former vice president Mohammad Yunus Qanooni.

The proposals were reportedly sent by political parties, and the 15 member committee is also reviewing views from 30 members of the council on the peace proposals, the key is to find a common ground for the peace process to continue and succeed, Tolonews reported.

EU Grants 2.9mn Euro Fund For Debt Relief to Afghanistan

Afghanistan, whose tax revenue dropped by 40% in April-May 2020, will receive 2.9 million Euro in grant funding by the European Union (EU) which will be used towards debt relief, the EU announced in a press statement on Tuesday.

Afghanistan has been witnessing decreasing revenue due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has adversely affected health, social and economic sectors. The country has had to face restrictions on economic activity and trade while there was extreme burden on expenditure on health, added the EU statement.

The Afghan government successfully managed to borrow considerable amounts in highly concessional loans from the IMF to cover its fiscal deficit during the crisis.

"Tuesday's announcement is good news for Afghanistan, as this additional funding will free space to increase the social, health and economic spending in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This comes in addition to the substantial support the EU has already provided to Afghanistan to tackle the pandemic, both bilaterally and through the COVAX facility," said Arnout Pauwels, Chargé d' Affaires a.i. The EU funds are channeled through the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT), to which the EU and its Member States (Team Europe) are the largest donor, with support amounting to EUR 335.9 million globally, which represents 51% of the relief fund. Besides Afghanistan, 27 of the most vulnerable countries around the world will benefit from debt service relief through the support



of the EU.

The support announced on Tuesday will also contribute to Afghanistan's macro-economic stability. Since the pandemic started, the EU has mobilized almost 147 million euros to Afghanistan to address the

immediate health crisis and provide humanitarian assistance to the people in need. As the largest donor to the COVAX facility, the EU and its member states have also enabled the delivery of almost 500,000 doses of vaccine to Afghanistan.

After China,...

because this can play a very effective role in neutralizing foreign sanctions."

He said, "Strategic cooperation between Iran and China is in fact a roadmap and the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the parliament will invite the Minister of Foreign Affairs to attend the parliament or the Committee to provide the necessary explanations in this regard to the lawmakers."

The senior lawmaker also said, "The parliament should review the strategic document between Iran and China, because according to the constitution if there is an obligation to our country in international treaties and agreements with other countries, it must be approved by the parliament."

He further explained, "Such documents are, in fact, roadmaps, and in order to implement these documents, normally, several contracts are concluded between the executive bodies, subsequently, the parliament must have its supervisory role on these contracts. It must be careful to make sure that no interests of our nation are neglected."

He stressed: "What is important is that the establishment's approach to signing long-term strategic documents is quite positive, and naturally the necessary measures should be taken to strengthen this cooperation."

Lavrov in Pakistan...

The Pakistani Foreign Office said on Monday that the Russian foreign minister will have delegation-level talks with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. He will also call on Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and have interaction with other dignitaries.

The Pakistan Foreign Office statement said during the talks between the two foreign ministers, the entire gamut of Pakistan-Russia relations will be reviewed and ways discussed to further broaden and deepen bilateral cooperation in diverse fields.

Get Out of...

the failure of the effort to train and equip these forces. Instead of trying to make the Afghan military self-sufficient, the US has kept it heavily dependent on our forces throughout the war. As Jeff Schogol concludes in a recent report, "Despite two decades and billions of dollars of support, Afghan security forces cannot survive without outside assistance." If the Afghan government cannot defend itself after twenty years of US support, it will always be too weak to survive without US military backing. Far from being a reason to stay in Afghanistan, the weakness of the government is proof that the war cannot be won. Keeping Afghanistan as a permanent protectorate is not a serious option. Propping up a corrupt government in Kabul has nothing to do with the

security of the United States. Our political and military leaders are allergic to admitting failure no matter how overwhelming the evidence of that failure may be. An entire generation of politicians and officers has been involved in selling the war with misleading and false claims of progress. The perverse incentives of our political culture have made perpetuating failed policies much easier and more rewarding than ending them. That is how withdrawing from a lost war has become more politically risky than prolonging the conflict.

The persistence of the nonsensical "safe haven" myth has meant that many Americans imagine that war in Afghanistan still has something to do with preventing terrorism on US soil two decades after the original attacks, but it does not. Keeping troops deployed

in war zones is not a safeguard against terrorism. If anything, maintaining a military presence in countries where our forces are not wanted is more likely to provoke more attacks in the future. Regardless, the reality is that the US is exceptionally secure from physical threats and terrorism is a relatively minor threat that does not require us to wage decades-long wars. Withdrawing from Afghanistan should force our political leaders and analysts to recognize that the larger "war on terror" has also been a costly waste. Our heavily militarized response to terrorism has served only to cause more death and destruction across two continents. It is time to end the US war in Afghanistan, and then our government needs to shut down the rest of the endless wars that it has been fighting since 2001.

Karzai calls...

in the region in order to ensure peace in Afghanistan.

Karzai said: "The US withdrawal or staying in Afghanistan beyond May 1 must be responsible in both cases; if they want to withdraw that withdrawal must be responsible in the sense that it must make sure that Afghanistan is peaceful and that it is done in a broader

understanding with major powers and the countries in the region so all together make Afghanistan a place of cooperation rather than competition."

"Second if they want to stay beyond May 1 that too has to be responsible. The United States cannot be staying in Afghanistan that is in conflict; No!"

"If the US wants to, wishes

to stay in Afghanistan, it can only be staying in Afghanistan and be in cooperation with a peaceful Afghanistan, a stable Afghanistan, not in Afghanistan in which the US presence is there, bases are there, but we are dying in a conflict and our children are suffering," he said. Karzai said he is appealing for a responsible exit on the part of the Americans.

Khalilzad...

"This itself shows that when we cannot agree on agenda, how can we agree on bigger issues?" said Rahmatullah Nabil, former head of the Afghan intelligence agency, NDS.

Back in Kabul, political leaders are assessing more than two dozen peace proposals, including that of President Ashraf Ghani, to compress them into a "unified" proposal for presenting it at the Turkey summit.

Abdullah Abdullah, head of the reconciliation council,

tweeted on Tuesday that the political leaders in their recent meetings continue to discuss in detail the peace proposals "to unify the republic's position for the Istanbul's peace conference." But Nabil said that President Ghani's proposal - with its three main parts of making, building, and maintaining peace - will not be fit for the country.

"I don't think that it will have a practical dimension. Considering the situation we and the region have and the views that have been provided

by different countries behind closed doors, I don't think it will be accepted at the Turkey summit," Nabil said.

The exact date of the Turkey conference is not known yet but recently sources said that there are discussions about April 16 as a potential date for the start of the event.

The reconciliation council has said that a 12 to 15-member team will represent the republic in the conference. The Taliban so far has not talked about the formation of their delegation that will attend the meeting.

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Iran, Pakistan Hold Joint Naval Drill In Persian Gulf

Iran staged a joint naval drill with Pakistan on Tuesday in the waters of the Persian Gulf amid tensions between Tehran and Washington. Iranian officials said the exercise aims at bolstering combat capabilities of the naval forces of the two countries and sharing information and expertise. "The exercise sought to demonstrate naval prowess and ensure closer coordination between the two sides," said Captain Reza Sheibani, a senior Iranian Navy officer. "It also sought to establish dynamic interaction to create lasting peace and security in the region." The annual naval exercise is part of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two countries and had been halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic last year. The drill saw the participation of an Iranian destroyer, a missile-launching vessel and a helicopter apart from logistics units, Sheibani

said. Maritime transfers and a passing exercise meant to streamline communication and cooperation in the event of war or humanitarian crisis were also part of the exercise, he added. The latest exercise comes two months after the Iranian Navy took part in the Aman-21 international naval exercise in Karachi as an observer. Pakistan's Navy had staged one of the largest naval exercises in the Arabian Sea that saw the participation of 45 countries, including the US, China and Russia. Iran has been involved in multiple military exercises in the Persian Gulf recently with the participation of regional countries, including Pakistan, Russia and China. The exercises came amid escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington over Iran's nuclear program.



A look at the world

After China, Iran Seeks Signing Accord With Russia: MP

Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Mojtaba Zonnour says the Islamic Republic seeks a similar China agreement with Russia in a bid to overcome US sanctions.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Mojtaba Zonnour "One of the most important ways to neutralize US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran is for us to have long-term relations with major powers and countries, as well as with neighboring countries in addition to countries in the region on a large scale."



Zonnour said, "The strategic document that was prepared and signed between Iran and China is in fact a long-term roadmap that ensures the two parties to make investments."

The Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee added "For example, if the Chinese want to build a refinery that feeds on Iranian oil and is compatible with our oil, it requires a long-term contract, and if there is no long-term contract, of course, China does not make this investment."

The senior MP continued "In addition to China, the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to conclude long-term and strategic documents with Russia that will strengthen bilateral economic interactions and pave the way for joint activities."

Zonnour went on to say, "We are looking for joint cooperation and bilateral interaction with these countries in the field of rail services, roads, refineries, petrochemicals, automobiles, oil, gas, gasoline, environment and knowledge-based companies ... **P3**

Saudi Arabia to Allow Only 'Immunized' Pilgrims to Mecca



Saudi authorities said Monday that only people immunised against COVID-19 will be allowed to perform the year-round Umrah pilgrimage, starting from the holy month of Ramadan.

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah said in a statement that only "immunised people" will be granted permits to perform Umrah as well as prayers in the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca.

These include individuals who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, those having received one dose of the vaccine at least 14 days before performing the pilgrimage, or a person who has recovered from the virus, the ministry said. The ministry also said it would increase the operational capacity of the holy mosque in adherence with COVID-19 measures and restrictions.

It was also not clear whether the policy, which comes amid an uptick in coronavirus infections in Saudi Arabia, would be extended to the annual Hajj pilgrimage later this year.

Saudi Arabia has reported more than 393,000 coronavirus infections and over 6,700 deaths from the virus.

The kingdom's health ministry said it has administered more than five million coronavirus vaccines, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

Last month, King Salman replaced the Hajj minister, months after the kingdom hosted the smallest Hajj in modern history due to the pandemic.

Mohammad Benteen was relieved from his post and replaced by Essam bin Saeed, according to a royal decree published by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

Only 10,000 Muslim residents of Saudi Arabia itself were allowed to take part in the Hajj last year, a far cry from the 2.5 million Muslims from around the world who participated in 2019.

Libya Forms Reconciliation Commission for Social Peace

Libya's Presidential Council announced late Monday the creation of a National Reconciliation Commission which will serve to establish social peace.

The head of the Presidential Council, Mohamed al-Menfi, said the commission would establish justice among Libyans and create solidarity in the country. He was speaking during a press conference in the



capital Tripoli which was also attended by the council's vice presidents Musa al-Koni and Abdullah al-Lafi.

Al-Menfi did not provide further details on the structure or the activities of the commission.

On April 1, Al-Menfi met with Libyan experts to discuss the establishment of a national reconciliation commission.

The current Libyan House of Representatives is divided between lawmakers in Tripoli headed by Mohammad Siala and lawmakers in Tobruk headed by Aguila Saleh. There are currently no accurate figures on the number of members in each group due to individual resignations and deaths.

On Feb. 5, Libya's rival political groups agreed in UN-mediated talks to form an interim unity government to lead the country to elections this December, designating a prime minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, and tasking him with forming a new government.

Libyans hope it will end years of civil war that have engulfed the country since the ouster and killing of strongman Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.



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