

Weekly Newsletter

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Afghan Peace Talks Progress



The CEO of Qatar Airways, Akbar Al Baker and Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi welcomed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his wife Susan on Saturday in Doha. Secretary Pompeo met with Taliban and Afghan government's negotiators in Qatar along with Qatar's ruler, Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha. Progress in delayed peace talks and

withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan were thoroughly discussed. Recently, violence broke out in Kabul when rockets hit densely populated areas killing at least eight people. SITE Intelligence Group, ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan have claimed the responsibility of carrying out the attack. The US Secretary's visit highlighted the attack and emphasized the negotiators on stimulating and sharing their ideas on increasing the successful outcomes to deal with such issues. It is true that peace talks between Taliban and Afghan government have not progressed much because of different issues i.e. the Taliban are expecting to have a Hanafi school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence but Afghan government is not agreeing to it because it will sideline the Hazaras who are predominantly Shia and they will become more vulnerable to violence. The delayed and stalled process of talks have surged the violence in Afghanistan. In response to the recent visit of Secretary Pompeo and violence augmentation in Kabul, Taliban started negotiating and talking to Afghan government. The representatives of Taliban and Afghan government announced on December 2nd, 2022 that they have reached a preliminary deal which is their first ever written agreement in a span of 19 years. Nader Nadery, a member of the Afghan government's negotiating team informed that,

“The procedure including its preamble of the negotiation has been finalized and from now on, the negotiation will begin on the agenda.”

The Taliban spokesman also confirmed that a joint working committee has drafted the agreement which includes a way forward for further discussions which will allow the negotiators on both sides to pay attention to more serious issues including ceasefire. As per US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, agreement is three pages long including rules and procedures for the negotiations and inclusive ceasefire. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman, Sediq Sediqqi, also said that the agreement will help both sides to reach some conclusions. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo encouraged the negotiators on both sides for their willingness to find common grounds. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry also encouraged the negotiators upon reaching the preliminary deal and said that it is another substantial step ahead. The agreement is an important development which is very essential for Afghanistan at the moment.

Massacre of Farmers in Nigeria



Nigeria has been facing and fighting violence for years. It is reported on Sunday that dozens of farmers and people were gruesomely slashed and massacred in northeastern Nigeria. The killings were carried out in the early afternoon of Saturday in the village of Koshobe and other rural communities in the Jere local government area near Maiduguri, the capital of the conflict-hit Borno state. As per the United Nation the death toll initially was 110. Security forces and volunteers are still looking for dead bodies and at least 10 women that are still missing. According to Edward Kallon, the UN's humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria, armed men entered the area and started killing men and women who were busy harvesting the rice fields. He further explained that people were not only ruthlessly killed but wounded as well. The incident has been called the most violent attack against harmless and unarmed civilians during the entire year. Though nobody has claimed the responsibility for carrying out this act but as per estimated Boko Haram and other minor groups including the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) have been involved in carrying out heinous crimes and killing in the same vicinity in recent years. Boko Haram has also been involved in stealing farmer's money and crops. It has also been reported that these groups are involved in killing at least 30,000 people and displacing about two million people, who are seeking refuge in Nige, Chad and Cameroon, during their armed campaign. The UN has urged that culprits behind this massacre must be brought to justice and the President of Nigeria seconded UN, while denouncing the attack, that the security crisis will be tackled. The president condemned the senseless killings of hard working Nigerian farmers by the hands of terrorists in Borno state.

Trump Bans Cotton Imports from Xinjiang



TRUMP BANS CHINESE COTTON IMPORTS

The U.S Customs and Border Protection Agency stated that under “Withhold Release Order,” the government has banned the import of cotton products from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which is China’s largest producer and a quasi-military organization. The Trump administration scaled up the economic pressure on Chinese region, Xinjiang as it has asserted that the factory has employed people to work forcefully. People who are working in the factory are said to be the detained Uyghur Muslims or from other Muslim minority groups. The reports suggest that the mega firm XPCCC has employed 12% of Xinjiang’s population. XPCC was founded in 1954, as a business and paramilitary unit, to settle the far west region of China. In 2015, XPCC produced 30% of Chinese cotton and the U.S. Treasury Department imposed a ban on all dollar transactions with the company. Kenneth Cuccinelli, Secretary of Department of Homeland Security, who also manages the border agency views the label of “Made in China,” as a warning signal. In a news conference, he stated that

“The cheap cotton goods you may be buying for family and friends during this season of giving - if coming from China - may have been made by slave labor in some of the most egregious human rights violations existing today in the modern world,”.

The government is considering imposing a region wide Xinjiang cotton import ban. According to the reports of the United Nations, nearly 1 million Uyghur Muslims have been detained in these camps, living in inhumane conditions. However, Chinese authorities deny such allegations and have stated that these camps have been created as vocational training centers for fighting growing extremism in the region, which poses a threat to the country’s peace and stability. A ban like this is going to have far reaching implications for the textile companies in China, who are involved in apparel business with the US traders and clothing companies. Hua Chunying, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman said that US has been fabricating the news of slavery of people in Xinjiang. The US economic practices against China undermine the market principles and can result in increasing unemployment in the region. The suppliers will sharply increase the manufacturing costs due to the new economic sanctions. There are only a few large enterprises that will be able to guarantee that no product of their company has been manufactured from

the XPCC cotton. But for the small business owners, giving guarantees like these to the US importers would be very difficult, which will leave a very negative impact on their product sale. Banning cotton imports from XPCC means banning all cotton imports from China. The US ban on importing cotton products from China could have implications for the other clothing exporters, specifically those in Asian countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. The garment factories in China and other textile producing countries have been using the XPCC cotton. Since the imposition of the new law, any US firm that is caught doing business with the XPCC could be blacklisted and will be liable to pay a civil financial penalty (the greater of twice the value of the transaction or US\$307,922 per transaction). Similarly, if the executives of the company are found to willfully violate the economic ban on XPCC, they will become subject to civil and criminal penalties. In the last days of his presidency, Trump has been taking steps to establish the United States' rigid position against China. Such measures are likely to make it difficult for president-elect Joe Biden difficult to ease tensions between America and China. In retaliation, China could impose a ban on import of US cotton and can therefore, intensify the trade war between the countries.

Iran Passes a Law to Boost Uranium Enrichment



PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA - OCTOBER 07: Iran President Hassan Rouhani give a speech inside the Malaysia Prime Minister Najib Razak office during official visit on October 7, 2016 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Hassan

The Iranian parliament on Tuesday approved a bill allowing uranium enrichment by at least 20% and a rise in low-level enriched uranium stocks. Iran steps up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal if sanctions are not eased in two months. Uranium will be used for different purposes including the making of Nuclear Weapons. The decision had been made in retaliation for the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist in Tehran last week, which Tehran has blamed on Israel, Iran's hardline dominated parliament had on Tuesday approved the bill with a strong majority. The draft law called the "Strategic Action Plan for Lifting the Sanctions and Protecting the Interests of the Iranian Nation" was accepted by 251 votes in the 290-member parliament, the Votes show the Iranian interest in the new Law.

Under the new law, Tehran would give two months to the deal's European parties to ease sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors, imposed after Washington quit the pact between Tehran and six powers in 2018. The law pushed by hardline lawmakers would make it harder for US President-elect Joe Biden, who will take office in January to rejoin the agreement. If the bill passed by the parliament gets the final approval of the Constitutional Council and becomes a law, the Iranian Atomic Energy Authority will begin to enrich uranium by at least 20% and increase their stockpile this could be an alarming situation for US and European countries. Iran is permitted to keep up to 300 kilograms, or about 660 pounds, of uranium enriched to 3.67 percent purity, a level that can be used for civilian purposes like nuclear power fuel. Iran has also stopped UN inspections on its nuclear sites. Iran also includes an additional point to allow Iran to withdraw in two months from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), if the parties to the nuclear agreement do not take steps to normalize Iran's banking relations, trade and oil exports. This decision will cause more difficulties for Iran and compel the US to get back into the pact.

UK Approves Covid-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use



UK making them the 1st country to begin vaccinating its population from COVID-19. British authorities announce this vaccine for emergency use, it's a green signal for the world & a first step towards ending the pandemic backed by rigorous science and multiple experiments from months. Multiple countries have invested in vaccine as the second wave of COVID put the countries into new economic burden, American drug maker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech comes as the virus surges again in the United States and Europe, putting pressure on hospitals and funeral homes in some places and forcing new rounds of restrictions on citizens and more load on economy of the states.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which licenses drugs in the U.K. and allow them to work on the vaccination of COVID-19, recommended the vaccine could be used after it reviewed the results of clinical trials that showed the vaccine was 95 per cent effective overall, it also offered significant protection for older people, among those most at risk of dying from the disease. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said. "The vaccine will begin to be made available across the U.K. from next week. It's the protection of vaccines that will ultimately allow us to reclaim our lives and get the economy moving again." People over 80, and health-care workers and other care workers will be the first to receive the shot in the UK. The drugmaker Pfizer will deliver its first shipping to the UK with the limited supplies of 80,000 vaccines & in the second half most will be delivered to the US but the final testing must be completed before that. Still this is unclear whether the Pfizer-BioNTech shots protect against people spreading the coronavirus without showing symptoms? Another question is how long protection lasts? The vaccine also has been tested in only a small number of children, none younger than 12, and there's no information on its effects in pregnant women. Lot of work still has to be done.