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PTI clinches most seats to form next govt in Azad Jammu and Kashmir



MUZAFFARABAD:

- Imran's party wins 25 constituencies
- PPP gets 10, PML-N six seats

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) was all set to form the next government in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on its own, as unofficial and unconfirmed results for 43 of the total 45 general seats of the Legislative Assembly suggested it being far ahead of its competitors. The PTI won in 25 constituencies — nine of them in Pakistan — followed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in 10 constituencies (one of them in Pakistan) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in six constituencies (two of them in Pakistan), according to the unofficial results collected till late on Sunday night from candidates as well as sources in the Election Commission. Among the winners was PTI's regional chief Barrister Sultan Mahmood who secured his seventh success in the

nine general elections held in LA-3, Mirpur-III since 1985. Apart from these nine general elections, two by-elections were also held in this constituency and both were won by him. The only elections he could not win were the general elections of 1991 and 2016. Addressing his supporters in Mirpur, Mr Mahmood expressed his gratitude to the Kashmiris for reposing trust in his party which he said was all set to comfortably form its government in the liberated territory. He attributed the PTI's success to the "vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan" and the "worst-ever performance of the outgoing PML-N government" in AJK. In Muzaffarabad district, PPP's regional president Chaudhry Latif Akbar secured a comfortable victory from LA-30 (Muzaffarabad-IV) constituency. Since 1985, Mr Akbar has won six of the nine general elections from this constituency besides one by-election. Also, PTI's central joint secretary Khawaja Farooq Ahmed emerged victorious

in a tight competition in the Muzaffarabad city with the PML-N candidate and an independent candidate. As a large digital screen outside his family home across Muzaffarabad's Combined Military Hospital announced his victory, his supporters set off firecrackers as a mark of celebration.

Raja Farooq Haider, who contested from two constituencies of his Jhelum valley district, lost to PTI's Deevan Ali Chughtai by a big margin in one of them. However, in the other constituency, he succeeded, though by less than 800 votes, according to his press secretary Raja Wasim Khan. Also, Chaudhry Tariq Farooq lost to PTI's Chaudhry Anwaarul Haq in Bhimber city in a tough competition.

Sardar Tanveer Ilyas Khan and Malik Zafar Iqbal of the PTI won from Bagh and Raja Mahal from Kotli, respectively. Mr Iqbal defeated the formidable Malik Nawaz of Muslim Conference who had never lost any general elections since 1985. In Kotli, Chaudhry Yasin of the PPP returned from both constituencies. Apart from him, Javed Iqbal Bhudanvi of his party also clinched victory, defeating younger brother of veteran politician Sardar Sikandar Hayat. Ansar Abdali and Chaudhry Akhlaque of the PTI also won in Kotli. In Poonch, PPP's Sardar Yaqoob Khan, former president and prime minister of AJK, won from his home constituency on the outskirts of Rawalakot. In the same district, Shahida Saghir and Abdul Qayyum Niazi of PTI also won. In Sudhnoti district, Faheem Rabbani and Sardar Muhammad Hussain of PTI secured victory.

PPP's Raja Faisal Rathore, Sardar Javed Ayub, Syed Bazil Naqvi and Mian Abdul Waheed also clinched victory from Haveli, Kutla and Lachrat in district Muzaffarabad and Lower Neelum Valley, respectively, sources said. In the upper belt of Neelum valley, PML-N's Shah Ghulam Qadir was among the successful candidates, while PML-N's Waqar Ahmed Noor and PTI's Ali Shan Soni



retained their seats in Barnala and Samahni, respectively. From among the indigenous parties, former prime minister Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan of AJK's Muslim Conference secured victory by a wide margin from Dhirkot, retaining the seat that has always returned his family. Sardar Hassan Ibrahim of the Jammu Kashmir Peoples Party (JKPP) also secured his second consecutive victory from Rawalakot city. In the 12 constituencies in Pakistan, PPP's Aamir Ghaffar clinched victory in Karachi by a wide margin to secure his third electoral victory, two of them in succession. Similarly, PTI's Abdul Majid Khan secured his fourth consecutive victory from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and PTI's Deevan Mohiuddin from Lahore secured his fifth consecutive win.

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/international/pakistan/this-is-what-imran-khan-wants-you-to-do-to-support-kashmiris>

Will peace be won in Afghanistan

By Maleeha Lodhi, former ambassador to US & UK



AS a resurgent Taliban continue their military advance in Afghanistan fears are growing in the region and beyond about what lies ahead for the war-torn country. A throwback to the past with armed power struggles between militias? A protracted civil war? An ascendant Taliban flushed with victory eventually setting up a Taliban government with nominal inclusion of minorities? Or will the Taliban reach out to other Afghan parties for negotiations to forge agreement on their country's political arrangements and future?

The American military withdrawal is nearing completion in what President Joe Biden described in his end-of-mission address as a speedier drawdown driven by safety concerns. It has been orderly and so far, casualty-free. This means that the US-Taliban Doha agreement is holding with the Taliban ensuring a peaceful exit. Pakistan has also played a supportive role in facilitating a smooth US pullout through GLOCS (ground lines of communication) and ALOCS (air lines of communication). But as the US drawdown entered its final phase, with 90 per cent now completed, fighting escalated between Afghan government forces and the Taliban. The Taliban have stepped up their offensive and in a series of military assaults overrun and captured many districts. Their apparent strategy to secure control of highways and encircle cities has seen a growing meltdown of government forces with surrenders by demoralised soldiers across northern Afghanistan that has reinforced their military momentum. Taliban spokesmen claim most districts have been taken by negotiation and without a fight. Having seized areas on the border with China, Iran, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan the Taliban now control the border there with the Afghan

government consequently losing their grip over significant parts. Taliban representatives have however sought to reassure anxious neighbours that they pose no threat to the region. Diplomatic efforts aimed at intra-Afghan negotiations that had stalled in Doha have been overtaken by fast-moving developments on the ground. Attention has turned to when the Taliban will likely mount an assault on Kabul and whether the ANSF would be able to hold them off for any length of time. Assessments vary about the fall of the Afghan government. Although President Biden has said a Taliban takeover is not inevitable, a much-cited US intelligence assessment concluded it could be as early as six months. Reduced US air support for Afghan forces may contribute to this. Pakistan's assessment is that Kabul could hold out beyond six months. There is still time for collective diplomatic action to avert a chaotic outcome in Afghanistan. The Taliban themselves have maintained a meaningful silence on this. Instead, they have announced they plan to accelerate the peace process in the coming month and present a written peace proposal. Their spokesman declared last week that "Although we have the upper hand on the battlefield we are very serious about talks and dialogue". At a recently convened meeting in Moscow a Taliban leader also reiterated the desire for a peaceful settlement. The US, for its part, has warned the Taliban against any military takeover and continued to call for a negotiated settlement. A State Department spokesman said earlier this month that "The world will not accept the imposition by force of a government in Afghanistan. Legitimacy and assistance for any Afghan government can only be possible if that government has a



basic respect for human rights”. Meanwhile, in response to a question, President Biden stated bluntly that the US would not be responsible if the Taliban took over militarily or if civil war broke out. The key question now is whether the international community can still act to encourage the Taliban and other parties to pursue a negotiated settlement. While Biden said it was time for “determined diplomacy” for peace he did not spell out what this meant other than reiterate that it was up to Afghans to decide their own destiny. Though time is running out there is still a narrow, but fast-closing window for collective action. The most immediate need is for regional states and big powers to desist from arming the warring Afghan sides and to strictly implement a policy of non-interference in this regard. A joint declaration to this effect should be considered. Anything less will fuel a civil war worse than that witnessed in the 1990s which will only compound the suffering of the Afghan people who yearn for peace and order. Beyond this, the extended Troika — US, China, Russia and Pakistan — plus Iran (who will need some persuasion) should consider mounting collective pressure on the Afghan parties to encourage them to work for an orderly transition to an interim government. Some would argue it is too late for this. But there is time for a last-ditch effort to avoid a chaotic outcome. Far better than simply

watching the situation unravel or issuing platitudinous statements. No country has enough leverage individually but collectively deployed leverage might influence the parties to be responsive.

The Troika plus Pakistan and Iran could offer a package of incentives to help spur intra-Afghan talks towards a settlement. This can include three elements.

One, an assurance to lend legitimacy to such an outcome especially as the Taliban would want to reinforce, not lose, the international recognition they won with the Doha agreement. Two, an offer to begin the process of delisting of individuals and entities from the UN’s sanctions regime; this was promised to the Taliban by the Doha accord in return for entering intra-Afghan talks. And three, the assurance of international economic assistance which the next government in Kabul will need to rebuild a war-ravaged country. Holding out the promise of a peace dividend should also aim to mobilise public pressure on the Afghan parties not to squander an opportunity for peace and stability.

Pakistan should encourage an early meeting of representatives of the extended Troika countries even if it is convened virtually to issue a no-arms supply and non-interference declaration as well as agree on a package of incentives to place before the Afghan parties. Let it not be said that diplomacy failed the people of Afghanistan who have already suffered so much through decades of war, turmoil and strife. And let history not judge that Afghanistan and the region all lost the peace.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1634536/-can-peace-still-be-won>

What we can learn from China?

Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy



WHEN Prime Minister Imran Khan categorically endorsed China's line on Uighur Muslims he succumbed to political expediency: "Because of our extreme proximity and relationship with China", he said, "we actually accept the Chinese version." A savvier politician facing the Chinese media might have tried a little hemming and hawing rather than dispense with truth, human rights and Muslim solidarity. Still, one must not be too harsh on the PM; any country which owes its life to a powerful patron has little leeway.

Much loved by some but feared by others, China today is an economic superpower. Geopolitics changed in 2017 when its GNP shot above that of the US. But what accounts for its phenomenal rise and ferocious progress? Equally, one may ask: why has Pakistan been on external life support from 1947 onward and barely limped along? The difference cries out for an explanation. Max Weber, the 19th-century German sociologist, would have an answer. Since his pioneering work, social scientists know economic growth goes hand-in-hand with a society's collective worldview and culture. Through data-driven research, Weber explained why Protestants and Calvinists had far outpaced Catholics in generating wealth and industrializing Europe. He concluded that progress-friendly cultures demand belief in rationality, rule of law, planning, punctuality, deferred gratification, and expectations of reward in this life rather than the next. Certainly not how minorities should be treated! But there's much else that China can teach Pakistan. Were he alive today, how would Weber see China in relation to Pakistan? First, China's worldview is — like that of 19th-century Protestants — entirely future-focused and this-worldly. Notwith-

standing the pride Chinese people take in their ancient science and civilization, there is no deep nostalgia and no calls for Ertugrul-like men on horseback to resurrect some ancient kingdom. Whether for good or bad, and whether under Mao's revolutionary communism or under Xi Jinping's capitalistic communism, the Chinese are a plain, hard-headed lot. This attitude sets the tone for education, both in school and university. Knowing that universities are the engines of progress, China is super-careful about who gets admitted. At the level of language, reasoning and math skills, Chinese students are expected to know everything that American students learn — but better. Today's gaokao — the cheating-free university entrance exam — is a carryover from the rigorous exam system (keju) of ancient China's civil service.

Reputed to be the toughest in the world, gaokao beats even that for various IITs (Indian Institute of Technology). Unfortunately, educated in a memorization-heavy culture steeped in religious matters, most Pakistani university professors — including those who are HEC certified and with hundreds of research publications — would not clear Chinese university entrance exams?

Second, a reborn Weber would see China clearly defining its national interest with economic advancement being at the very top. As a rationalist-materialist country China aims at becoming the world leader in space exploration, brain science, quantum computers, electric cars, biopharmaceuticals, renewable energy, etc. Five-year plans are followed to the letter; there is no empty chatter or arbitrary wish lists. At the next level of priority is politics. To reunite with Taiwan, China rattles its sabres from time to time. Nevertheless,

China-Taiwan economic links are strong. Taiwanese companies have invested about \$60 billion in China, and one million Taiwanese people live in China with many running Taiwanese factories. The Chinese political leadership keeps its military in check. There is no history of Kargil-like dead-end adventures and the military stays clear of trade matters. The warrior ethic is firmly subordinated to the capitalist ethic. In Pakistan's case, warriors define the national interest. Googling 'national interest', I found occurrences in speeches, university theses and in National Defense University publications. All such references were security and India related. In this single-minded approach, Pakistan-India trade remains hostage to Kashmir being resolved on Pakistan's terms. Nowhere to be found is a plan for where the country hopes to be 20-30 years from now. No one takes the Planning Commission of Pakistan seriously. Third, Weber would confirm that strong work ethics leads to high labour productivity, the backbone of economic growth. Although he knew only of Protestant-Calvinist workers and capitalists, the qualities of diligence, discipline, responsibility, punctuality and honesty of the skilled industrial workforce extends into the cultures of China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea etc.

In contrast, Pakistan's labour productivity is appallingly low — less than half of China's. Many economists and businessmen have pointed out that producing an item in high-wage China is cheaper than in low-wage Pakistan. Poor productivity owes to poor worker skills and general dissatisfaction. Exploitative employers pay minimum wages, ignore principles of fairness and disallow grievance mechanisms. But the ethics of workers are also low. Few take pride in or enjoy work, are diligent, or take initiatives. Like our parliamentarians and professors, most are shirkers who need to be reminded of their duties. These poor habits start from Pakistani



schools where kids are forced to focus on exam techniques and taught just enough to get by. Cheating is tolerated. Some parents — including those who emphasize religious rituals — encourage their children to cheat as a way to get ahead. But, at a still deeper level, quality education for all is impossible given extreme wealth disparities. In China such disparities had been evened up by Mao's communism. Although huge excesses happened in the Cultural Revolution, education was universalized and hard work celebrated. China is reaping dividends from its communist past. Pakistan never saw any such evening-up. Leaders of the Pakistan Movement — Jinnah and Allama Iqbal (the post-1930 Iqbal) included — were staunchly anti-communist. Some were big landlords who saw danger in educating their serfs. Education was a low priority in 1947 and remains low. Curiously, the country that Pakistan's founders feared and disliked most (after Russia) is now Pakistan's closest ally. It does bash its Muslims; the evidence is irrefutable. Yet — other than how religious minorities should be handled — China has much to teach Pakistan. Among the most important lessons is creating a skilled workforce, giving dignity to labour, distributing wealth and public resources reasonably, emphasizing birth control, and encouraging a mindset oriented to the future rather than the past. If Pakistan wants to break the crutches of foreign dependence, that's the way to go.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1634259/what-to-learn-from-china>

SMOKERS' CORNER: DECODING POST-9/11 SCHOLARSHIP

By: Nadeem F. Paracha

During debates on the political role of Islam and secularism vis-à-vis Pakistan, 'moderates' often point out that since there is no concept of the Church in Islam, the faith is inherently secular. They argue that secularism is thus a product of Christian societies because the Church there was once an intermediary institution between man and God, and enjoyed political authority. So, from the 18th century onwards, when modernity and its many products created new realities, these required a new political paradigm to operate in. It is from this that secularism emerged, to separate the Church from the state and create spaces for the new realities to expand and thrive. Church authority had by then begun to be suspected as an impediment to human progress. The idea of defining Islam as inherently secular is not new. It was largely popularised by 'Islamic Modernists' in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And even though the modernists were often at pains to fully articulate exactly what 'inherently secular' really meant in the context of an organised religion, this idea remained problematic for forces who wanted to use Islam to create a theocracy.

In the early and mid-20th century, those moving towards demanding the creation of a separate Muslim nation in South Asia, put forward similar ideas to circumvent their Islamist critics. For example, in 1949, Pakistan's first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, announced that Pakistan as a Muslim-majority state can never become a theocracy because there was no concept of the Church or priesthood in Islam. And despite the fact that the influence of those calling for a theocracy began to swell, their arguments in this regard continued to be challenged by the 'Islam has no Church' reasoning. In her 2019 book *Faith and Feminism in Pakistan*, Afiya S. Zia makes

an interesting point by writing that 'the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship (1977-88) set up the Pakistani state as a Church.' Indeed, a theocracy needs a Church empowered to interpret and implement scriptural texts, mostly to rationalise and sustain the political *raison d'être* of the theocracy.

Instead of questioning the Zia regime's establishment of the Pakistani state as the Islamic political equivalent of the Church, the new post-9/11 academics often rationalise piety and morality in this Church

Some of the first people to notice what the Zia dictatorship was attempting to do were leading members of the Women's Action Forum (WAF). WAF was formed in 1981 to challenge many of Gen Zia's ordinances, which WAF believed were aiming to repress women and keep them in the 'chadar and chardiwari [veiled and within the house].' In May 1986, a frontline member of WAF, the late lawyer Asma Jahangir, made a scathing speech at a WAF gathering, in which she asked why the dictatorship was turning the ulema [religious scholars] into a political class. She then added, 'there is no wall of priesthood between a believer and God in Islam.' WAF had initially used the 'Islam has no Church' argument to counter the 'Islamisation' of the Pakistani state in the 1980s. But soon it made a conscious decision to openly declare itself as a secular organisation. This created cleavages within WAF. Some members wanted to continue framing their arguments in the context of Islamic modernism and/or 'Islam has no Church' pretext, while others found this approach limiting in a fight against a rising theocracy. The Islamic political equivalent of the Church as an institution of religious and political authority was finally established in Pakistan. One can trace the polity's reaction

to this through the response of women activists and scholars. A founding member of WAF, the late Shahla Zia wrote in *Shaping Women's Lives* (1998) that the context of 'no Church in Islam' against Gen Zia hadn't worked. She insisted that 'women's rights fall in the realm of secular human rights' and this required WAF to seek the secularisation of laws. But voices such as Shahla's that had been prominent in the women's movement during the Gen Zia dictatorship, had already begun to be countered by those who, according to Afiya Zia, seemed to have accepted the ascendancy of political Islam (and the formation of the Church). The newer so-called 'scholar-activists' had put the blame of the failure to stop Gen Zia from Islamicising the state, at WAF's feet. According to them, WAF had refused to take into account the general non-secular nature of Pakistani society. Shahla responded by pointing out that those suggesting this mostly lived abroad and had no clue what activists had to go through in challenging a dictator. After 1999, the Gen Musharraf dictatorship attempted to somewhat soften the impact of the Islamicisation process that had continued through the 1990s. But the tragic 9/11 attacks in the US and the manner in which they impacted the Muslim diaspora in the West, saw many Muslim academics in the US adopt 'postmodernist' and 'post-secular' ideas. This was in response to the criticism that Muslims began to attract after the attacks. A most surreal scenario appeared in the some of the top Anglo-US universities and think-tanks. As US troops invaded Afghanistan, and Pakistan became a frontline state aiding the US against militant Islamists, and as Westerners grappled to understand why would a group of 'pious Muslims' ram planes into buildings full of ordinary people, a plethora of young Muslim academics were given space on campuses and in think-tanks to explain to the Americans what had transpired. The surreal bit was that this space was provided despite the fact that the academics were wagging their fingers at

secularism, liberalism and modernism. These were not Islamic modernists of yore who would try to exhibit that things such as democracy and secularism were inherent in Islam. Nor were they insisting that radical Muslim states needed to be secularised. Instead, they were postmodernist caricatures, drenched in lifestyle liberalism and operating in Western institutions, but looking for a third way to define Muslims outside the 'Western secular' contexts and the context of Islamic modernism. These academics went about looking for examples in Muslim history where Islamic laws were used for the benefit of common men and women. They claimed that contemporary cultural traditions and exhibitions of piety in Muslim societies had a rational base, but that this rationalism was according to a societal ethos that was different from the secular ethos of western modernity. Indeed, this fascinated their Western patrons but, at the same time, Islamists gleefully adopted such narratives as well. For example, many US-based Pakistani 'feminist-academics' attacked their Pakistan-based contemporaries for facilitating attacks on Muslim culture by insisting on promoting secular and modernist feminist narratives. Ironically, this was exactly what conservatives and Islamists in Pakistan accused the 'liberals' of doing. Shahla Zia saw such post-9/11 scholarship as something born from a sense of defeatism. The Church had been constructed but, instead of questioning its construction, the new academics rationalised the ideas of piety and morality in this Church. Moreover, they do so by sitting thousands of miles away in lands where the Church remains separated from the state and away from lands where this romanticised and rationalised piety and morality have been used over and over again to satisfy political and even violent social and personal impulses, especially against women and minority groups.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1636571/smokers-corner-decoding-post-911-scholarship>

EXCLUSIVE: A toast to the happy couple! Princess Diana's niece Lady Kitty Spencer, 30, shares a ? with new husband billionaire fashion tycoon Michael Lewis, 62

- Princess Diana's niece, 30, has married millionaire tycoon Michael Lewis, 62 in a lavish ceremony in Rome
- Friends of Lady Kitty Spencer have been posting from Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati about wedding
- Her sisters Lady Eliza and Amelia, as well as Pixie Lott and Emma Thynn, Marchioness of Bath, attended
- Snaps show royal wearing a stunning white lace Dolce and Gabbana gown for the occasion, with long veil



Lady Kitty Spencer shared a champagne toast with her new billionaire tycoon husband Michael Lewis as they celebrated their wedding at a lavish ceremony in Italy, surrounded by her friends. Princess Diana's niece, 30, has spent the last week in the country with pals, getting ready for her wedding to the South Africa-born 62-year-old - who is five years older than her father Charles Spencer.

As the searing summer heat began to ease at 6pm, Princess Diana's niece said 'I do' in front of a hushed congregation in the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati, a stunning country mansion with views towards Rome. Photographs of the bride wearing a high-necked Victori-

an-inspired lace gown by favourite designer Dolce and Gabbana for the occasion, which features trendy puff sleeves and a cinched waist. Meanwhile she swept her hair back into a low bun and opted for a lengthy train for the occasion. Kitty was walked down the aisle by her brothers Louis Spencer, Viscount Althorp and Samuel Aitken. Her husband opted for a smart white tuxedo and, later, Prince William and Harry's younger cousin changed into a second gown, with short sleeves, pink floral detailing and a flowing hemline. Michael and Kitty were joined by her sisters, twins Eliza and Amelia; Viscountess Emma Weymouth and her husband Ceawlin Thynn, the Mar-

quess of Bath; pop star Pixie Lott and her model boyfriend Oliver Cheshire; Idris Elba's wife Sabrina; and Made In Chelsea star Mark Vandelli. Also present were Mr Lewis's three adult children from a previous marriage. Lady Kitty, – the eldest child of Diana's brother Earl Spencer – is understood to have formed strong relationships with her husband's children. After the ceremony, the two could be seen toasting to their marriage while surrounded by their closest friends and family on the balcony of the villa. In keeping with the Italian theme, fashion house Dolce and Gabbana played a key role. Several guests, including Viscountess Weymouth, socialite and DJ Marjorie Gubelmann and fashion designer Jade Holland Cooper wore the designers' dresses. Before the ceremony, Viscountess Weymouth and Ms Gubelmann posted on Instagram that their outfits were made by the Italian duo, while Ms Holland Cooper flaunted a small D & G handbag on the social media site. Lady Kitty may have also opted to wear the Spencer tiara, a headpiece of diamonds in a floral design of tulips and star-shaped flowers, which her aunt wore for her wedding at St Paul's Cathedral on July 28, 1981.

It is not known if Earl Spencer attended the wedding, but on Friday – when the rehearsal took place – he posted a picture on his Instagram account of the gardens at his Althorp estate. After the ceremony, Lady Kitty and Mr Lewis treated guests to a feast and dancing before an incredible fireworks display lit up the Italian sky. Throughout the week, several friends shared social media posts hinting that her nuptials were imminent. Dutch fashion model Marpessa Hennink posted a selfie with Kitty with the words: 'Team Bride. It's happening finally.' Lady Kitty's siblings Lady Eliza and Amelia, 28, have both remained silent on social media in recent days, while her father Charles shared a video of his home Althorp House yesterday morning. It is unlikely Lady

Kitty's cousins Prince William, 39, or Prince Harry, 36, have attended the event in Italy amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis in the UK and the US. Wedding guests are thought to be staying at the five-star Hotel de la Ville in Rome, and include Viscountess Emma Weymouth, singer Pixie Lott and artist Piotr Krzymowski. Canadian-South African model Maye Musk was also pictured at the lavish ceremony wearing a layered polka dot dress and posing on the balcony alongside Julia Perry. Photographer German Larkin shared the sweet straw bag that was left for guests upon their arrival at the hotel, featuring Italian flag colours on the straps and the word 'baci' embroidered across it, which in Italian means 'kisses'. The bag was packed with an assortment of gifts from the soon-to-be married couple. On Friday, guests enjoyed a dinner that took place at the Galleria Del Cardinale, a lavish baroque events space in the city.

Sharing the menu on their social media accounts, the meals included a classic veal and tuna salad, beef broth and pumpkin cream ravioli, baked eggplant, and a selection of sweet treats. Lady Kitty has never publicly spoken about her husband, who she was first seen kissing in August 2019 after leaving Club 55 in St Tropez. Previously speaking to the summer issue of Town & Country, the model cousin of Princes William and Harry said: 'It's not that I don't place an importance on love. It's because, for me, love is the most important thing in the world, and I will protect it with all my heart by not making it a topic of discussion. 'You open yourself up to other people having opinions, and it just isn't relevant to anybody's life but mine and my family's. Despite staying tight-lipped on her beau, Kitty added: 'I just look forward to a really happy home life: a happy marriage and happy children. And I feel very at peace that things play out the way they should.'

Kitty's fiancé Michael has three adult children and was previously married to a woman

named Leola in 1985. It's not yet known whether Lady Kitty will convert to Judaism, Mr Lewis' faith, before the big day. In June, Lady Kitty was pictured showing off a large diamond ring on her engagement finger at London's Cash & Rocket Masquerade Ball.

This week, Made in Chelsea star Mark Francis Vandelli uploaded a coy post from Rome simply saying: 'And so it begins @kitty.spencer'. Another friend, Simon Huck, posted a snap as he enjoyed a drink on the street in the city, writing: 'And so it begins.' While Kitty's friends appear unable to contain their excitement about the wedding on social media, her family have remained remarkably more tight-lipped. Lady Kitty's sister Lady Amelia and Eliza haven't shared posts for several weeks, while her father Charles Spencer posted a video of the grounds of his home Althorp House yesterday morning. Earlier this week, Kitty shared a photograph posing in a leopard print bodycon dress as she posed for a snap on a bridge during a girl's weekend in Florence. Several comments appeared to hint at the upcoming big event, with one writing: 'Yeah, can't wait to see you!' Meanwhile artist Piotr Kamil Kryzmowski writing: 'Can't wait!' Just like Diana, the London-born daughter of Diana's brother Charles Spencer and Victoria Aitken, grew up in the Spencer family seat Althorp in Northamptonshire.

While Kitty is often spotted looking glamorous in the public, her brother Louis, 27, who is set to inherit their father's title, keeps a lower profile. 'Primogeniture can be a tricky topic, because as times are changing, attitudes are as well. We've grown up understanding that it's Louis to inherit, and Louis will do an incredible job,' Kitty added. Speaking of her childhood, she went on: 'We have such an emotional attachment to Althorp. 'That's where we would have our Easter-egg hunts and our Christmases; I have my little vegetable patch, I learnt to ride a horse there, I learnt to ride a bike and to rollerblade. 'It's so lovely

to look back on the history and think everybody else probably learnt to ride a horse there, too.' The Spencer siblings - including twin sisters Eliza and Amelia - all turned heads when they attended the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018.

Overnight, Kitty's Instagram following leapt from 37,000 to a staggering half a million.

'I woke up the next day and looked at my phone and thought, "Whoops, did I take someone else's by mistake?". It was very weird, and a little bit overwhelming.' Speaking about her relationship with her siblings, Eliza and Amelia, she added: 'We are a bit of a tripod. It's been horrible to be separated this year. 'They are in South Africa, which is only an hour ahead, and with two flights going there a day, you usually have the comforting thought of, "I could always be there in the morning if I needed to be." 'It's been awful to be completely shut off, and thinking, come what may, we can't be there for each other...' Despite usually living a jet-set lifestyle, Kitty has travelled much less this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Last summer, Kitty shared an insight into her very luxurious trip to the French Riviera and Italy's Amalfi Coast and Capri, showing off delicious meals and idyllic beaches on her Instagram page.

Kitty has had a global outlook from a young age, growing up between Althorp and Cape Town, South Africa. As well as studying at the University of Cape Town, she later studied art history and Italian in Florence, On being a student in Italy, she added: 'Everything felt so simple and carefree, but you're still being stimulated in a culturally rich environment.

'It's just pure pleasure and learning, and being surrounded by every type of beauty. If I'm lucky enough to live to the age of retirement, Florence is where you'll find me.'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-9820745/Princess-Dianas-niece-Lady-Kitty-Spencer-30-weds-80million-fashion-tycoon-Michael-Lewis.html?ito=social-twitter> dailymailUK

NY: Iranian Operatives Planned to Kidnap a Brooklyn Author, Prosecutors Say

By Benjamin Weiser

An Iranian American journalist living in Brooklyn who has been a sharp critic of the Iranian government was the target of an international kidnapping plot orchestrated by an intelligence network in Iran, federal prosecutors said Tuesday. In an indictment unsealed in federal court in Manhattan, four Iranians were charged with conspiring to kidnap the journalist and author, Masih Alinejad. Ms. Alinejad was not identified by prosecutors, but confirmed in an interview that she was the intended target of the plot. Last year, Ms. Alinejad wrote in a newspaper article that Iranian government officials had unleashed a social media campaign calling for her abduction. The four defendants all live in Iran and remain at large, the prosecutors said, identifying one of them, Alireza Shavaroghi Farahani, 50, as an Iranian intelligence official and the three others as “Iranian intelligence assets.” A fifth defendant, accused of supporting the plot but not participating in the kidnapping conspiracy, was arrested in California. The indictment describes a plot that included attempts to lure Ms. Alinejad, an American citizen, to a third country to capture her and forcibly render her to Iran. The intelligence official, Mr. Farahani, and his network used private investigators to surveil, photograph and video record Ms. Alinejad and members of her household in Brooklyn, the government said. The extensive surveillance that Mr. Farahani’s network procured included the use of a live, high-definition video feed depicting Ms. Alinejad’s home, prosecutors said. “This is not some far-fetched movie plot,” William F. Sweeney Jr., the head of the F.B.I.’s New York office, said in a statement. Audrey Strauss, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan, said, “A U.S. citizen living in the United States must be able to advocate for human rights without being

targeted by foreign intelligence operatives.” The indictment comes at a precarious moment in the fraught relationship between the United States and Iran. President Biden late last month ordered airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias in Syria and Iraq, telling Congress that he acted to defend American military personnel and deter Iranian attacks. At the same time, the two countries are working toward a resurrection of a 2015 deal to limit Iran’s nuclear power. Ms. Alinejad, who hosts a program called “Tablet” on Voice of America Persian, a U.S. government-owned broadcaster, has been harshly critical of the nuclear deal. In a brief phone interview on Tuesday evening, Ms. Alinejad said that learning details of the plot was shocking to her but that she had told her husband and son not to panic. “That shows that they’re not scared of America — they’re scared of me,” she said, adding, “Otherwise, they would not send anyone here to kidnap me.” In a 2018 essay in The New York Times, Ms. Alinejad described her decision to leave Iran a decade earlier. “As a journalist in Iran, I often got into trouble exposing the regime’s mismanagement and corruption until, eventually, my press pass was revoked,” she wrote. “I was often threatened with arrest or worse for writing articles critical of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ultimately, I was forced to flee my homeland in 2009.” According to the indictment, in 2018, the Iranian government tried to pay relatives of Ms. Alinejad who live in Iran to invite her to travel to a third country, apparently for the purpose of having her arrested or detained and taken to Iran to be imprisoned. Her relatives did not accept the offer, the indictment said. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/13/nyregion/iran-masih-alinejad-kidnapping.html>

America to continue air strikes supporting Afghan troops: US general

- Since early May, violence has surged after the insurgents launched a sweeping assault
- Taliban's assault has seen the insurgents capture scores of districts and border crossings



KABUL: The United States will continue air strikes in support of Afghan forces fighting the Taliban, a top US general said Sunday, as the insurgents press on with offensives across the country. Since early May, violence has surged after the insurgents launched a sweeping assault just days after the US-led foreign forces began their final withdrawal. The Taliban's deadly assault has seen the insurgents capture scores of districts, border crossings and encircle several provincial capitals. "The United States has increased air strikes in the support of Afghan forces over the last several days, and we are prepared to continue this heightened level of support in the coming weeks if the Taliban continue their attacks," General Kenneth McKenzie, head of the US Army Central Command, told reporters in Kabul. McKenzie acknowledged that there were tough days ahead for the Afghan govern-

ment, but insisted that the Taliban were nowhere close to victory. "The Taliban are attempting to create a sense of inevitability about their campaign. They are wrong," he said. "Taliban victory is not inevitable." McKenzie's remarks came as Afghan officials in the southern province of Kandahar said fighting in the region had displaced about 22,000 families in the past month. "They have all

moved from the volatile districts of the city to safer areas," Dost Mohammad Daryab, head of the provincial refugee department, told AFP. On Sunday, fighting continued on the outskirts of Kandahar city. "The negligence of some security forces, especially the police, has made way for the Taliban to come that close," Lalai Dastageeri, deputy governor of Kandahar province, told AFP. "We are now trying to organise our security forces."

Local authorities had set up four camps for the displaced people who are estimated to be about 154,000. Kandahar resident Hafiz Mohammad Akbar said his house had been taken over by the Taliban after he fled.

"They forced us to leave... I am now living with my 20-member family in a compound with no toilet," said Akbar.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1899991/world>

Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson successfully rockets to outer space

By Jacki Wattles, (CNN Business)

Richard Branson became the first person to ride into space aboard a rocket he helped fund. The supersonic space plane developed by his company, Virgin Galactic, roared into the sky over New Mexico early Sunday, carrying Branson and three fellow crewmembers. Branson — along with Virgin Galactic employees Beth Moses, Colin Bennett, and Sirisha Bandla and pilots Dave Mackay and Michael Masucci — boarded the SpaceShipTwo, a winged plane with a single rocket motor that the company has spent nearly two decades developing, before the crack of dawn. Attached beneath its massive, twin-fuselaged mothership, dubbed WhiteKnightTwo, the vehicle took to the skies at 8:30 am MT and climbed to about 50,000 feet in the air. Just after 9:15 in the morning, the SpaceShipTwo detached from its mothership and dropped momentarily before its engine screamed to life and the vehicle swooped upward. On board, the passengers experienced up to three Gs of force from the burst of extreme acceleration and watched the blue sky fade into the star-speckled darkness of outer space. At the top of the flight path, more than 50 miles high, the vehicle was suspended in weightlessness for a few minutes, allowing the passengers to enjoy panoramic views of the Earth and space as SpaceShipTwo flipped onto its belly. It then deployed its feathering system, which curls the plane's wings upward,



mimicking the shape of a badminton shuttlecock, to turn the spaceship rightward as it flew back into the Earth's thick atmosphere and glided back down to a runway landing.

As Branson floated around in microgravity, he taped a message using cameras onboard the space plane: "To all you kids out there — I was once a child with a dream, looking up to the stars. Now I'm an adult in a spaceship...If we can do this, just imagine what you can do," he said. Surrounding SpaceShipTwo's takeoff was — in typical Branson fashion — a high-production party with friends, family, employees and a few VIPs in attendance. Earlier on Sunday, Branson tweeted a picture of himself and a barefoot Elon Musk hanging out. Grammy-nominated artist Khalid is also expected to perform an as-yet-unreleased song on an outdoor stage.

What this means

Branson's flight — which came just nine days before Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos is slated to rocket into suborbital space aboard his own company's spacecraft — is a landmark moment for the commercial space industry. The up-and-coming sector has for years been seeking to make suborbital space tourism (a relatively simple straight-up-and-down flight, as opposed to orbiting the Earth for longer periods) a viable business with the aim of allowing thousands of people to experience the adrenaline rush and sweeping views of



our home planet that such flights can offer. Branson and Bezos are situated to become direct competitors in that industry, each offering tickets to wealthy customers for brief rides to the upper atmosphere aboard supersonic, rocket-powered spacecraft. Virgin Galactic plans to conduct just one more test flight before it will begin flying paying customers. More than 600 people have reserved tickets priced at \$200,000 to \$250,000 so far. The company is expected to reopen ticket sales soon, though at a higher price point. Branson's flight also helps bolster Virgin Galactic's reputation as the "world's first commercial spaceline." That's how the company advertised itself as it signed up those hundreds of willing customers who've waited through development delays — and a tragic mishap — for their chance to ride aboard SpaceShipTwo. But whether or not Virgin Galactic will really be the "first" commercially operational suborbital space company is not yet clear. Bezos' space company, Blue Origin, appeared poised to put its founder in space before Branson, until Virgin Galactic made the surprise announcement earlier this month that he would be on the very next test flight, a departure from the company's earlier plans. Bezos' flight, slated for July 20, could kick off the company's commercial operations sooner than that, and one of his fellow passengers on the flight is a paying customer, having won a ticket through a charity auction for the price of \$28 million. The company has not yet begun selling tickets to the public, however, nor has it set a specific date for when it plans to do so. Neither company is expected to offer tickets that are affordable to the average American. Branson did tease a big "announcement" about his effort to "democratize space" ahead of the flight. But he revealed Sunday only that Virgin Galactic would be holding a "sweepstakes" for two free tickets, along with a tour of the facility from the winners from Branson himself.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/11/tech/richard-branson-virgin-galactic-space-flight-scen/index.html>

Pakistani singer Arooj Aftab makes it to Barack Obama's Summer Playlist



Pakistani singer Arooj Aftab's music has left quite an impression on former US president Barack Obama. Her song 'Mohabbat' from the album Vulture Prince has been featured in Obama's 2021 summer playlist. Obama has been sharing playlists of music he has enjoyed listening to during the summer for the past couple of years. This year's playlist is titled Barack Obama's Summer Playlist. "With so many folks getting together with family and friends, there's a lot to celebrate this summer," he said. "I put together a playlist of some of the songs I've been listening to lately — it's a mix of old and new, household names and emerging artists, and a whole lot in between." Aftab's song 'Mohabbat' has been mentioned alongside songs from artists such as Stevie Wonder, The Rolling Stones and Rihanna. The singer was delighted to be included in the list and shared the news on her Instagram. "Well this has been wonderful to wake up to!" she wrote. "Thank you Barack Obama." Celebrities such as Riz Ahmed, Mira Sethi, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and Natasha Noorani were quick to congratulate Aftab on social media for being featured on the playlist.

<https://images.dawn.com/news/1187987/pakistani-singer-arooj-aftab-makes-it-to-barack-obamas-summer-playlist>

'Leader of the free world' must step up and prove it

DALIA AL-AQIDI



While the US discusses with Iraq the future of their partnership and cooperation in the global war against terrorism, and Washington continues its negotiations with Iran to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), several important events are taking place in this troubled region. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps intelligence chief Hossein Taeb led a delegation to Iraq this month to meet not government officials but the leaders of pro-Iran armed factions. Taeb gave clear orders to the Iraqis to continue their attacks on US targets in Iraq until the departure of the last American soldiers.

At the same time, these groups continue to assassinate Iraqi activists. Demonstrations in Baghdad and other southern provinces demanded the end of impunity, and punishment for the entities that gave orders to abduct and kill more than 70 activists and hundreds of peaceful protesters since the anti-corruption and pro-democracy movement swept Iraq in October 2019. Despite these calls, the world has mostly chosen to ignore their suffering.

Meanwhile, across the border in Iran, protests erupted in the southwestern Khuzestan province over the extreme water shortage. Soon enough, the demand for water changed to bigger political demands, spreading to different locations including the capital, Tehran.

The oil-rich Khuzestan province is home to Iranian Arab minorities who have faced oppression and discrimination by the regime in Tehran, which has not hesitated to use deadly force against the protesters; 10 have been killed and more than 100 detained, while Iranian officials and state-run media claim "foreign interference." Iran's supreme leader

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged his people to be cautious. "The enemy will try to use any tool against the revolution, the nation, and the people's interests, so we must be careful not to give him any pretext," he said. Once again, there was no sign of a significant reaction from the international community.

"What the Iranian regime is doing at home and in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon should not go unnoticed and without any serious consequences."

Dalia Al-Aqidi

On several occasions, the people of Iran have tried to show the world the brutality of their own regime but they have been failed by the very same countries that stand against oppression and human rights violations — including the US, whose own constitution starts with three simple words: "We the People ...". How many more people must die for the international community to react? How many children need be orphaned for the world to take action? What should oppressed people do, other than to die, to make their voices heard? Instead of begging the Iranian regime and waiting for its blessing to come back to the negotiating table, the US should take firm measures to stop the Iranian atrocities on its own soil and elsewhere. What the Iranian regime is doing at home and in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon should not go unnoticed and without any serious consequences. From a humanitarian perspective, people's suffering should not go unnoticed. The White House continues to echo British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's statement at the Munich security conference in February, when he said

President Joe Biden had restored the US as leader of the free world and helped the West to reunite. Later, after the G7 summit in England, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan proudly declared: "I really do not believe that it is hyperbole to say that the president of the United States returns from this trip as the clear and the consensus leader of the free world." If that is the case, how can the president not hear the cries of all these innocent people, and attempt to lend a helping hand. Why can the "leader of the free world" not tell Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi that allowing foreign militias to brutalize his own people is unacceptable, and he is therefore not welcome in the White House?

Why can't he impose more sanctions on the Iranian regime to limit its vicious and devious maneuvers, and send a clear message to its people that they are not alone? Why does he stay quiet when 30 percent of children in Lebanon sleep hungry?

To claim such a title, a leader must act. Either that, or maybe it is time to redefine the term "free world."

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1900051>

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If a cricketer can become Prime Minister

Actor Mehwish Hayat recently revealed some grand career aspirations during an interview with a local news outlet. Hayat, who has solidified her position in the entertainment industry, is now looking to broaden her horizons by opting for a rather different career path. The actor shared during the interview that she would like to make a debut in the political arena soon but she does not wish to stop there. Hayat has her eyes set on the Premier's seat. The Punjab Nahin Jaungi actor explained during a Q&A segment that she is becoming more interested in politics with time. "It is something I want to pursue as a subject," shared Hayat. When asked by the host whether the actor would prefer to enter politics through parliament or via a political party, the Jawani Phir Nahin Ani actor said, "The intention is to help bring a positive change in the country. Time will better tell whether that happens by entering parliament or by forming my own political party." Explaining how she has been inspired by the politics of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), she shared, "I'm inspired by [their] politics because they've brought about good changes and a shift in societal thinking. Imran Khan was a cricketer before [he entered politics]. If a cricketer can become prime minister then surely an actress can also become one as well." When questioned over whether she is interested in politically challenging Imran Khan and becoming the country's next PM, she answered, "I don't want to challenge him but someone is bound to take his place later on and I can also become a contender for the prime minister's position."

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311929/mehwish-hayat-believes-she-could-run-for-prime-minister>

'Alms' not 'arms': Muslim boy, 11, reported to UK terror watchdog after teacher's mixup

- **Highly intelligent' boy's desire to give to charity was misunderstood by a teacher, who thought he sought to buy weapons**
- **Britain's Prevent program is regularly accused of excessive Muslim focus**

LONDON: An 11-year-old Muslim boy has been reported to Britain's anti-terrorism watchdog after he told his class he wanted to give "alms" to the needy, which his teacher mistook for "arms." A legal challenge issued by the parents against the school states that the teacher had asked what members of the class would do if they received a large sum of money. The boy, whose family said he is deeply interested in medieval history and described him as "intelligent" and "widely read," said he responded by saying he would-- "give alms to the oppressed." Alms is another, somewhat archaic, way of describing charity, and it is often understood as being provided by religious people to the most vulnerable and needy in society.

However, the boy's teacher is said to have panicked and reported the child to Britain's anti-terror watchdog, Prevent, after mistaking the "alms" for "arms." Despite the school acknowledging that the boy is "highly intelligent," the report appears to focus on the fact that his comments are "non-typical" for a boy of his age. Police quickly closed the case after determining there was no substance to it, no sign of radicalization or extremism, nor any threat to national security. The parents' legal challenge against the school is demanding a written apology, damages, and the expunging of the Prevent referral from the boy's record before he moves on to other schools. They claim that the teacher broke anti-dis-

crimination laws by applying a stereotype about his racial and religious background in their treatment of him. Attiq Malik, director of Liberty Law Solicitors, who is representing the boy's family, told MailOnline: "Yet again we see another example of a 'fail' by the Government's Prevent program on vulnerable impressionable children, highlighting why the program is potentially harmful and needs to be scrapped as it simply does not work." Malik also warned that despite the accusation being completely unfounded, the Prevent referral could still come back to bite the family.

He told The Guardian: "Every time a Prevent referral is made, it generates a record with the Home Office and various other intelligence agencies. "And it's very unfair that a child, who has done nothing wrong, is suddenly having data created about him which may not ever be deleted." Britain's Prevent program was established to identify and support people deemed as vulnerable to any form of radicalization and in danger of becoming terrorists. It forces staff in schools and hospitals to report issues they consider concerning. While the number of potential far-right extremists referred to the program has been steadily increasing, Prevent is still regularly accused of concentrating on Muslims. The referral, the boy's father said, is "especially distressing" because the school failed to discuss it with the family beforehand as required.

It is "having a massive impact on us as a family," he said, adding that his wife "hasn't slept properly since this happened."

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1884811/world>

How I escaped Japan in a box- Ex-Nissan Boss Carlos Ghosn

By: Dearbail Jordan & Simon Jack

At 10.30pm on a cold December night in 2019, a former titan of the global car industry lay bundled inside a box on board a plane, waiting to flee Japan. "The plane was scheduled to take off at 11pm," recalls Carlos Ghosn. "The 30 minutes waiting in the box on the plane, waiting for it to take off, was probably the longest wait I've ever experienced in my life." Now, for the first time, the man who was once the boss of both Nissan and Renault has detailed his daring escape. In an exclusive interview with the BBC, Mr Ghosn tells how he disguised himself to slip unnoticed through the streets of Tokyo, why a large music equipment box was chosen to smuggle him out of Japan and the elation he felt when he finally landed in his native Lebanon. "The thrill was that finally, I'm going to be able to tell the story," he said. Mr Ghosn was arrested in November 2018 over allegations by Nissan that he had understated his annual salary and misused company funds, which he At the time, Mr Ghosn was the chairman of the Japanese carmaker. He was also chairman of France's Renault and the boss of a three-way alliance between both carmakers and Mitsubishi. His cost-cutting at Nissan - initially controversial - was ultimately seen to have saved the carmaker and he became a highly respected and recognisable figure. But he insists he was "collateral damage" in a fight back from Nissan against the increasing influence of Renault which still owns 43% of the Japanese company. Documentary series Storyville details his extraordinary rise and sudden fall in Carlos Ghosn: The Last Flight which will be shown on BBC 4 on Wednesday 14 July.

'Shock, frozen trauma' Describing the moment of his arrest at Toyko airport three years ago, Mr Ghosn said: "It's like you're being hit by a bus or something really very

traumatic happened to you. "The only memory I have of this moment is shock, frozen trauma," he said. Mr Ghosn was taken to the Tokyo Detention Centre where he was given prison clothes and confined to a cell. "All of a sudden I had to learn to live without the watch, without the computer, without the telephone, without the news, without the pen - nothing," he said. For more than a year, Mr Ghosn spent long periods in custody or was held under house arrest in Tokyo after being bailed. It was not clear when a trial would take place - the fear was it could take years - and Mr Ghosn faced a further 15 years in prison if convicted, in a country which has a 99.4% conviction rate.

- Carlos Ghosn: The fall of the god of cars

It was during a period of house arrest, when Mr Ghosn was told he would not be allowed to have any contact with his wife, Carole, that he decided to find a way out. "The plan was I could not show my face so I have to be hidden somewhere," he said. "And the only way I could be hidden [was] to be in a box or be in a luggage so nobody could see me, nobody could recognise me and the plan could work." He said the idea of using a large box that would normally contain musical instruments "was the most logical one, particularly that around this time there were a lot of concerts in Japan". But how would someone once so famous - now infamous - in Japan be able to get from his home in the capital to an airport and make his escape? The plan was, said Mr Ghosn, to behave as normally as possible on the day. "It should be a normal day where I have a normal walk with normal clothes, normal attitude and all of a sudden, everything change." Mr Ghosn would have to swap the suits he'd worn for years as a high profile

executive in the global automotive sector for something a little more casual. Think jeans and trainers. "You can imagine I had to go places where I never been, buy clothes I've never bought," he said. "All of this was part of how do you give yourself a maximum of chance of being successful and absolutely not drawing any attention to yourself."

'The moment'

From Tokyo, Mr Ghosn travelled by bullet train to Osaka where a private jet was waiting at the local airport to depart. But first, the box, which was waiting for Mr Ghosn at a nearby hotel. "When you get in the box, you don't think about the past, you don't think about the future, you just think about the moment," he said. "You're not afraid, you don't have any emotion except the huge concentration on 'this is your chance, you can't miss it. If you miss it, you're going to pay with your life, with the life of a hostage in Japan'."

Mr Ghosn was transported from the hotel to the airport by two men, who were posing as musicians. In all, Mr Ghosn reckons he was in the box for around an hour and a half, though it felt like it lasted "one year and a half".

The private jet took off on time, and Mr Ghosn - now free from his confines - flew through the night, swapped planes in Turkey before landing in Beirut the next morning.

Lebanon does not have an extradition treaty with Japan so Mr Ghosn has been allowed to remain there. However, Americans Michael Taylor and his son, Peter, have since been handed over by the US to Japan and now face three years in prison for helping Mr Ghosn to escape. Also facing jail is Greg Kelly, Mr Ghosn's former colleague at Nissan, who remains under house arrest in Tokyo over allegations he helped his former boss disguise his earnings. Mr Kelly denies the charges.

What of the people who have been left behind in Japan?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-57760993>

Islamophobia envoy

BY calling for the appointment of a special envoy to counter Islamophobia, American lawmaker of Somali origin Ilhan Omar has raised a pertinent issue at a time when anti-Muslim incidents are on the rise in many countries. In a letter to the American secretary of state calling for creating such a position, the Democratic lawmaker from Minnesota has said it must be recognised that "Islamophobia as a pattern ... is repeating in nearly every corner of the globe". Ms Omar has singled out China, India and Myanmar as state actors responsible for "violations against ... Muslims", while also calling out white supremacist groups for spreading anti-Muslim hate. Ms Omar has herself been the target of anti-Muslim abuse in her own country; the outspoken lawmaker has faced online abuse, including from other American legislators. In fact, Donald Trump, while in the White House, told her and other progressive Democratic women lawmakers of colour to "go back" where they came from. Islamophobia has taken many ugly forms across the globe. In Europe and North America far-right groups have indulged in anti-Muslim violence, deadly in some cases, emboldened by demagogues and populist politicians looking to grab a few votes by demonising the other. Meanwhile in India, Hindu zealots have lynched Muslims for eating beef, knowing they can get away with their crimes as the state is sympathetic to their hateful ideology. Myanmar and Sri Lanka have also seen incidents of mass violence against Muslims, often instigated by extremist sections of the Buddhist clergy. Therefore, an effort on the global level against Islamophobia is clearly needed. Instead of the US taking the lead — as it may punish geopolitical enemies such as China and look the other way when friends such as India persecute Muslims — perhaps the effort should be led by the UN. Prime Minister Imran Khan has raised the issue of Islamophobia at the multilateral body, and it is through the combined efforts of the international community that the menace of anti-Muslim hate can be confronted. www.dawn.com/news/1636973

G20 split on climate goals as China, India push back on coal phaseout

Coal phaseout 2025 deadline too soon for some nations. Some wanted more aggressive global warming target than Paris 2015.

NAPLES: Energy and environment ministers from the Group of 20 rich nations have failed to agree on the wording of key climate change commitments in their final communique after China and India refused to give way on two key points. One of these was phasing out coal power, which most countries wanted to achieve by 2025 but some said would be impossible for them. The other concerned the wording surrounding a 1.5-2 degree Celsius limit on global temperature increases that was set by the 2015 Paris Agreement. Average global temperatures have already risen by more than 1 degree compared to the pre-industrial baseline used by scientists and are on track to exceed the 1.5-2 degree ceiling. "Some countries wanted to go faster than what was agreed in Paris and to aim to cap temperatures at 1.5 degrees within a decade, but others, with more carbon-based economies, said let's just stick to what was agreed in Paris," said Italy's Ecological Transition Minister Roberto Cingolani. The G20 meeting was seen as a decisive step ahead of United Nations climate talks, known as COP 26, which take place in 100 days' time in Glasgow in November. Italy holds the rotating presidency of the G20, and Cingolani, as chairman of the two-day gathering, said negotiations with China, Russia and India had proved especially tough. The G20 nations, which includes Saudi Arabia, collectively account for some 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product and some 60 percent of the planet's population. At the Naples talks, the United States, the European Union, Japan and Canada made clear they "firmly intend to go faster than the Paris agreement by the (end

of) the decade, and below 1.5 degrees," Cingolani said. Cingolani said the G20 had made no new financial commitments, but added that Italy would increase its own climate financing for underdeveloped countries. The urgency of climate action has been brought home this month by deadly floods in Europe, fires in the United States and sweltering temperatures in Siberia, but countries remain at odds over how to pay for costly policies to reduce global warming. Despite the two points of disagreement, Cingolani said the G20 had put together a 58-point communique and that all the countries agreed that decarbonization was a necessary goal. All G20 members agreed to at least meet the Paris goals. US President Joe Biden's climate envoy, John Kerry, participated in the Naples talks. Earlier in the week, Kerry called on China to join the United States in urgently cutting greenhouse gases. The majority of the countries at the conference also backed a goal of moving faster to reduce the use of coal, the Italian minister said, without naming all of the nations. But during the talks, China, as well as Russia and India, were "more prudent" in embracing more ambitious goals, Cingolani said. "For those countries, it means putting into question an economic model," he said. Exactly what commitment nations, including those which heavily pollute, are willing to make toward fighting climate change will be also on display at UN climate conference taking place in Scotland in November. The national leaders of the G20 countries will have the opportunity to thrash out the sticking points that emerged in Naples when they meet in Rome at the end of October.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1899546/business-economy>

German gymnasts fight against sexualisation by wearing full-body suits at Tokyo Olympics



The German women's gymnastics team opted to wear full-body suits in qualifications at the Tokyo Olympics on Sunday in a move they said was designed to promote freedom of choice and encourage women to wear what makes them feel comfortable. The team, composed of Sarah Voss, Pauline Schaefer-Betz, Elisabeth Seitz and Kim Bui, competed in red and white unitards, which are combined leotards and leggings extending to the ankles. They wore similar outfits during training on Thursday and said they could chose to wear them again in competition. Voss said the team had discussed their choice of attire before competing on Sunday and had settled on the unitard. "As you are growing up as a woman, it is quite difficult to get used to your new body in a way," the 21-year-old said. "We want to make sure everyone feels comfortable and we show everyone that they can wear whatever they want and look amazing, feel amazing, whether it is in a long leotard or a short one." Voss said the team — which wore full-body suits at the European championships in April in a move aimed at countering

the sexualisation of the sport — were keen for the trend to catch on. "We want to be a role model in any case, to make everybody have the courage to follow us," Voss said. The Germans' decision to wear unitards earned them praise from fellow competitors

in Tokyo. "I think it's really cool that they have the guts to stand on such a huge arena and show girls from all over the world that you can wear whatever you want," said Norwegian gymnast Julie Erichsen. "I applaud them for that." In recent years gymnastics has been rocked by widespread cases of sexual and physical abuse, prompting the introduction of new safety protocols meant to protect athletes. For women, the standard competition outfit is a leotard, with long, half-length sleeved and sleeveless garments allowed. Outfits covering legs are authorised in international competitions but to date they have been worn almost exclusively for religious reasons. In July, Norway's women's beach handball team had also protested against sexualisation in the sport by opting to wear shorts instead of bikini bottoms at a European championship match in Bulgaria. The team was fined 1,500 Euros (\$1,764) for being "improperly dressed" as per the regulations.

<https://images.dawn.com/news/1188090>

Taliban Resurgence Raises Terrorism Fears from Moscow to Beijing

BY: ELTAF NAJAFIZADA, FASEEH MANGI AND SUDHI RANJAN SEN

The Taliban's lightning-fast advance to control more territory in Afghanistan is raising alarms from Russia to China, as U.S. President Joe Biden's move to withdraw troops disrupts a balance of power in South Asia that has held steady for about two decades.

At least 1,000 Afghan troops this week retreated into Tajikistan, prompting the country mobilize an extra 20,000 soldiers to guard its frontier. Russian President Vladimir Putin's sought out assurances from the Taliban that it will respect the borders of Central Asian states that once were part of the Soviet Union, while neighboring Pakistan has said it won't open its borders to refugees. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who warned last week that the most pressing task in Afghanistan was "to maintain stability and prevent war and chaos," plans to travel to Central Asia next week for talks on the country. Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for the ministry, on Friday called the U.S. withdrawal "hasty" and said Washington must honor its commitments to "prevent Afghanistan becoming once again a haven for terrorism." "The U.S. has rushed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and left the Afghan people in a mess, which further exposes the hypocrisy behind the pre-

text of defending democracy and human rights," Wang Wenbin said at a briefing in Beijing. The Taliban will not allow "anyone or any group to use Afghan soil against China or any other countries," Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, a senior official at the group's political office in Doha, Qatar, said in a WhatsApp message Friday. "This is our commitment." Biden on Thursday had insisted the U.S. military had achieved its goals in Afghanistan and would leave by Aug. 31, just shy of its 20-year anniversary after the deaths of 2,448 U.S. service members and about \$1 trillion in spending. Yet the battle will go on for the people in Afghanistan and surrounding countries, threatening in particular the \$60 billion in projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) right next door.

"The chaos in Afghanistan could spill over into other countries and lead to regional turbulence," said Fan Hongda, professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of the Shanghai International Studies University. "China does not want to take over the U.S. role, but hopes to facilitate regional peace and stability because it has interests in the region." The Taliban have dramatically expanded their hold on Afghan territory in recent months, leaving the U.S.-backed government in control of little more than 20% of the country, according to data compiled by the Long War Journal. The insurgent group now holds 204 of 407 districts, up from 73 at the beginning of May, while the Afghan government only controls 74 currently. The rest are contested. At the moment, authorities in Kabul still control all of the 34



provincial capitals, although two of them near the borders of China, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are now being contested. The Afghan Defense Ministry has stepped up airstrikes against Taliban fighters in recent weeks. The Taliban's swift rise after fighting the U.S. for 20 years risks leading to a collapse of the Afghan government and military, a scenario that last took place in the 1990s after the Soviet Union withdrew. While the U.S. seeks to prevent al-Qaida from regaining a foothold in Afghanistan, the implications are dire for the six countries bordering the country — as well as nearby nations such as India that have frequently been the target of Jihadist attacks.

The risks of regional contagion were made clear in April when a car bomb exploded at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in the Pakistani city of Quetta, not far from Taliban strongholds in southern Afghanistan. The attack, claimed by the loosely affiliated Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), showed that governments in the region might struggle to protect high-profile diplomats and business people. "The Taliban has close links with as many as 20 terror groups who operate across the region from Russia to India," said Farid Mamundzay, Afghanistan's ambassador to India. "Their activities are already visible on the ground and they pose a significant threat to the region." Pakistan, which helped the Taliban rise to power in the 1990s, is now worried about a resurgence of the TTP, a group that has been blamed for 70,000 deaths of civilians in the country since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Only recently crushed by a combination of Pakistan military operations and U.S. drone strikes, the TTP may see an opportunity to attack Chinese projects to influence policy in Islamabad.

"These groups want to hurt Pakistan, and these attacks hurt the most," said Asfandiyar Mir, a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at

Stanford University. "The situation in Afghanistan is an important factor for the security of CPEC." With an economy that has grown by about five times since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, China is a particularly ripe target. Showing the importance of the relationship between Beijing and Islamabad, Pakistan's army has raised a dedicated force of thousands to protect CPEC projects across the country. A Taliban-led Afghanistan would likely solidify relations between China and Pakistan on one side and the U.S. and India on the other, with Russia and Iran in the middle to adjust policies depending on the threat perception, according to Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, a former Indian ambassador in Afghanistan, Syria and Myanmar. "The region will be severely impacted, but the rest of the world will not be immune to the shifts in geopolitical balance, extremism and violence," said Mukhopadhyaya, currently a senior visiting fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, a think tank based in New Delhi. As the Taliban makes gains, many Afghans are fleeing villages for the relative safety of bigger cities. Pakistan expects 500,000 refugees from Afghanistan, and authorities have said they'll be kept in border camps. More than 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees are already in Pakistan, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A win for the Taliban would ultimately embolden all sympathizers across the region, said Madiha Afzal, a non-resident fellow at Washington-based Brookings Institution. "Foot soldiers of these groups also cross over from one to the other," she said. "They see the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's position as a victory for jihadists."

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/middle-east/2021-07-09/taliban-resurgence-russia-china-2100053.html>

First Smart Card issued for this year's Hajj

JEDDAH: The first smart Hajj card for this year's pilgrimage was issued in the presence of Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal, who is also the chairman of the Central Hajj Committee, and his deputy Prince Badr bin Sultan. This came during an inspection visit to the holy sites on Monday to check on the readiness of the facilities to receive pilgrims. This will be the first time the technology is used to serve pilgrims throughout their journey. The tour began with Prince Khaled inaugurating the Al-Shumaisi Security Control Center project. The project covers an area of 1.6 million square meters and is supported by smart systems for screening and a unified digital gateway that facilitates traffic and reduces the waiting period of people arriving in Makkah during peak times from 45 to seven minutes. The number of vehicle lanes has been also increased from six to 16, and special lanes have been dedicated to buses, transport vehicles, trucks and emergency vehicles. The center includes administrative offices, a mosque, a center for civil defense and another for the Red Crescent Authority, and a building for security and governmental authorities. The governor also inaugurated the Al-Zaidi Reception Center project in the presence of Dr. Abdulfattah Mashat, Saudi deputy minister of Hajj and Umrah. The center aims to facilitate the movement of pilgrims from and into Makkah, reduce the waiting time for buses and improve the visual image at screening points. The center includes a parking lot that fits over 8,000 vehicles, entry and exit gates and an inspection zone for vehicles. It also issues the smart Hajj card, provides an automatic reading of the Hajj permits and offers hospitality services, including transportation of luggage to the holy sites and of pilgrims to the mosque to perform Tawaf or to visit Mina.

FASTFACTS

- A unified digital gateway inaugurated to

monitor and facilitate traffic arriving in Makkah. • The number of vehicle lanes has been also increased from six to 16. Special lanes have been dedicated to buses, transport vehicles, trucks and emergency vehicles.

Mashat explained that the Hajj smart card is linked to all services provided for pilgrims, allowing them to enter the camps and hotels and use the available transportation. The card is also used to pay at points of sales and ATMs, guide lost pilgrims, control entry to the camps and time movements. The Makkah governor visited the holy sites and inspected the readiness of Arafat and Mina, where he visited a model of the camps and listened to a briefing on its plans to receive pilgrims. He also reviewed the precautionary measures in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), such as visual and thermal screening upon entry to living accommodations. The sanitization process has been intensified, and masks and sanitizers will be distributed among pilgrims. Social distancing will also be enforced on-site, inside the rooms and during transportation. Ready meals will be available for each pilgrim in their rooms, without the need to gather at dining halls. More than 1 million meals have been prepared for the Hajj season this year, taking into consideration the highest standards of quality and safety. Prince Khaled also reviewed transportation plans: 3,000 passenger buses have been readied for pilgrims, with each accommodating 20 people. The buses will be distributed over four tracks, based on the colors red, green, yellow and blue. Each track is linked to the housing location of pilgrims. To organize and manage crowds, a smart program designed specifically for this purpose will be used. Hajj will start on Dul Hijjah 8 (July 18). The day of Arafat will fall on Dul Hijjah 9 corresponding to July 19.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1893026/saudi-arabia>

Muslim Women 'put up for sale' Online Decry Islamophobia in India

NEW DELHI: Delhi police on Saturday said they were investigating online harassment involving hundreds of Muslim women, who were put up "for sale" on a now-defunct app and website titled "Sulli Deals," many of whom also received rape and death threats.

The women, active on social media platforms such as Twitter, found their profile pictures displayed on GitHub, a web platform that hosted the open-source app, as the "Sulli Deal of the day," offering people the chance to "bid" on them in a mock auction. GitHub immediately shut down the website for "violating its policies," but several of the women say the app's purpose was to degrade and humiliate them. The term "sulli" is a derogatory slur for Muslim women in India, commonly used by Hindu nationalists. On Thursday, Delhi police registered a case against "unknown persons" under IPC Section 354A (concerning sexual harassment) over a complaint received through the National Cyber-crime Reporting Portal after the Delhi Commission for Women raised the matter. "We have lodged a case on this issue, and we are now investigating," Delhi police spokesperson Chinmoy Biswal told Arab News on Saturday. Many whose pictures were uploaded on the site are prominent, vocal Muslim women, including researchers, pilots, journalists, and artists. However, despite their prominence, several said they doubted the police would do enough to find and charge the perpetrators. "If one goes by experience, then I don't think any action would be taken against the perpetrators," Nabiya Khan, a Delhi-based poet and writer, told Arab News.

"I am exploring legal action against these men and perpetrators. I hope to get justice. I hope my complaint is not met with animosity but dignity," she added. • Many whose pictures

were uploaded on the site are prominent, vocal Muslim women, including researchers, pilots, journalists, and artists. • However, despite their prominence, several said they doubted the police would do enough to find and charge the perpetrators. Khan said she is still being harassed online "day in and day out, with people sending all kinds of pictures and pornography to me." Commercial pilot Hana Mohsin Khan, whose photo was also uploaded, said she is seeking closure and justice in the case, especially since "traumatized women's concerns have to be addressed. "Not everyone is strong, and there are many women who are traumatized after the experience," she told Arab News. "We should make sure that those people who are harassing are behind bars; only then will (the victims) have closure. If we don't do that, they would be permanently traumatized." Mohsin Khan said she only heard about the case when a friend shared a link to a tweet that took her to an image of hers being featured on the site. "I did not understand (what it meant) in the beginning. When I clicked on it, random girls' pictures came, and on the fourth click, my name came, it said 'Sulli Deals of the day' and 'click here to share on Twitter.' I have never been so angry in my life. "That anger has been constant," she added, saying she immediately filed a complaint with the police. "I did not want these guys to get off scot free." Media professional Sania Ahmed said she tried to confront the men responsible for harassing the women "despite the constant threat" she faces from them. "When I raised the issue with guys who were doing it, they started harassing me, threatening me with rape and all. The (person operating the) unknown account was not scared of any exposure, and the account kept on harassing by changing names," she said.

“It’s extremely offensive and violative of me as a woman. They are doing it because I am a woman and a Muslim,” she added. Ahmed lamented the fact that Twitter had failed to block the accounts, despite complaints. “One account ran a poll for 24 hours with the question: “Which one of these women would you choose for your harem? And my name was on the poll. I complained to Twitter, but it did not take it down” she said. Twitter was unavailable for comment when contacted by Arab News on Saturday. Ahmed blamed the current political climate for “this surge in hatred and Islamophobia.” Since assuming top office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been accused of remaking India into an authoritarian, Hindu nationalist state with the latest attack seen by the women as part of an effort to target Muslims. “The impunity with which they are doing this is because they are not afraid; maybe they (the perpetrators) have political patronage, maybe they have political support — that’s why they are not scared of consequences,” Ahmed said. Mohsin Khan agreed, drawing focus on an “extension of majoritarian politics,” which makes it “hard to be a Muslim” in India. “They are trying to humiliate minorities by doing such horrendous acts. It is no secret that it is very hard to be a Muslim in India, especially a Muslim woman. We are a minority within a minority,” the pilot said. Ghazala Wahab, a Delhi-based author of “Born a Muslim: Some Truths about Islam in India,” believes the government has “incubated and nurtured” hatred. “Such people enjoy immunity ... Even in the physical space, when you see someone making a hateful video, or somebody attacking a Muslim person or killing him, see the kind of sheltering that person gets,” Wahab told Arab News. “Not being held accountable for what you have done further incubates and further nourishes the hatred,” she added.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1892031/world>

West Indies, Pakistan agree to four-match T20 series



BRIDGETOWN: West Indies and Pakistan have agreed to play a revised four-match Twenty20 International series, Cricket West Indies (CWI) announced on Sunday. The two boards — who had initially planned a five-match T20 series — were forced into the alteration to the scheduled tour dates after West Indies’ current ODI series against Australia was rocked by a positive Covid-19 test which saw Thursday’s second match suspended. It was finally played on Saturday with the third and final match pushed back to Monday — one day before the scheduled opener against Pakistan. The revised dates allow for an opener in Barbados on Wednesday with three further matches in Guyana. “Together with the PCB [Pakistan Cricket Board], CWI have examined various scenarios, and we jointly agreed that the best solution in the present circumstances is to cancel the first T20 International and play a four-match series starting on Wednesday and keep the rest of the tour schedule unchanged,” said CWI president Ricky Skerritt. “Both teams are in the final stages of preparing for the ICC T20 World Cup, so we anticipate an exciting and entertaining series of games.” The T20 World Cup begins in the Gulf in October with West Indies looking to retain the title.

The teams will also play two Tests as part of the new 2021-2023 World Test Championship.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1636906>

'Don't Sacrifice Your Life to Visit the Taj Mahal': India Reopens but Fear Pervades

By Emily Schmall and Karan Deep Singh

AGRA, India — From a rickety fishing boat on the Yamuna River, Sumit Chaurasia points out how the setting tangerine sun catches the sparkle of the mother-of-pearl embedded in the Taj Mahal, India's majestic monument to love. For a decade, Mr. Chaurasia, 35, has made such poetic observations to tourists. But since March 2020, when India imposed a nationwide lockdown to curb the coronavirus, its monuments have been largely closed. Visas for foreign tourists have been suspended, and he and legions like him have been out of work. While the Taj Mahal partially reopened in mid-June — with strict limits on the number of visitors — Mr. Chaurasia's life, like much of India, remains in limbo: no longer totally shut down, but far from fully normal or safe. "The corona is still with us," said Mr. Chaurasia, pointing out the flames licking the riverbank from a crematory next to the monument. This spring, Agra, like India's capital, New Delhi, ran out of space to cremate its dead, with thousands a day dying from Covid as India experienced one of the world's most catastrophic encounters with the disease. The crowds that usually throng the Taj at sunset have been reduced to a handful of mostly local residents, roaming around the 25-acre complex for just over \$3 a ticket.

This near-emptiness makes Mr. Chaurasia cry, but he prefers it to the alternative despite the hardships it imposes on him and the family he supports: elderly parents, a wife and two young daughters. "Don't sacrifice your life to visit the Taj Mahal," he said as the boat gently bobbed on the holy Yamuna while monarch butterflies fluttered and pelicans soared over the trash-clogged shores. India is only now emerging from its traumatic spring, when a devastating second wave of the coronavirus



hit, imprinting grim memories of frantic searches for hospital beds, medicine and oxygen — and of funeral pyres that burned day and night, turning the skies an ash gray. As case numbers have fallen, the authorities have cautiously reopened the country, including monuments like the Taj Mahal. But just 4 percent of the country's 1.4 billion people are fully vaccinated, and health officials warn another wave may be looming, casting a pall over the life that is starting to return. "We don't go out unless it's necessary," Mr. Chaurasia said. Agra, with a wealth of Indo-Islamic architectural treasures including the Taj, is usually cacophonous and traffic choked. It is now quiet and uncrowded, and so too are the stores selling the inlay marble handicrafts and treacly sweets for which the city, the onetime capital of the Mughal empire, is famous. Agra is an essential stop for anyone visiting India, from backpackers to presidents — Donald J. Trump visited in February 2020 during a state visit — and about 800,000 people in the city, half its population, are dependent on tourism. Virtually all of them have been affected, said Pradeep Tamta, a city tourism official. Many of the artisan workshops that populate Agra's ancient streets have not survived 15 months of intermittent lockdown, and most of the rest



are struggling. In an open-air building along a narrow alley, Irfan Ali, 51, hunches over a machine used to file down shards of mother-of-pearl into moons, stars and other shapes that will later be adhered to marble in intricate patterns on tiles, tabletops, vases and trays.

Foreign tourists, Mr. Ali said, have over the years driven up demand for the art form, which represents the materials and motifs of Agra's most famous monument.

"They wanted a piece of the Taj Mahal," he said. "Now there's only silence." Across town, Gaurav Goel, the co-owner of a family sweets business, still bears the shaved head of a Hindu mourner. The shop, Panchhi, was named for its founder, Mr. Goel's great-grandfather, Pancham Lal. The family specializes in petha, a syrupy sweet Agra delicacy made from ash pumpkin, a grayish gourd, boiled in lime water and sugar. According to folklore, petha was invented in the 1630s while the Taj Mahal was being built, to keep the 20,000 laborers energized through Agra's intense summer heat. Mr. Goel's grandfather, Kanhaiya Lal Goyal, greatly expanded the business by experimenting with new flavors like saffron and cardamom and slicing blocks of petha into different shapes. A cancer patient, he died of complications from Covid-19 in May. In normal years, Mr. Goel's five shops sell about \$1.3 million worth of sweets. In 2020, his sales fell by 40 percent. But he feels ambivalent about customers returning. "The loss of business

doesn't hurt us emotionally," he said. "It's more that we don't lose someone."

The scarcity of visitors is a problem not only for Agra but also for the Archaeological Survey of India, the government agency that uses its share of the Taj's ticket sales to restore and maintain many of the 3,500 lesser-known but historically significant monuments from India's long, epic history. The pandemic is not the only challenge facing the Taj. Leaders of India's governing party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, have sought in recent years to recast the Taj — built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to entomb his beloved queen, Mumtaz Mahal — as a symbol of the Muslim invasion of India. Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu monk and the top official in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where Agra is, took the monument off a state list of tourist sites, and has said it does not "reflect Indian culture."

Sumit Upadhyay is a member of the ruling party, known as the B.J.P. But he is also an Agra-based travel agent, and as he strolled the Taj's grounds, his loyalties to his hometown and his business seemed to take precedence over the party. He said the Taj has been neglected while its revenues have been partially channeled by Mr. Adityanath's government into "enhancing their own monuments," including a temple elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh devoted to the Hindu god Ram. The temple is being built over the rubble of a mosque that a Hindu mob destroyed in 1992. "They are not doing anything for the Taj Mahal," he said of the state government. "You have to take care of this monument if you want people to come into India." On its busiest days since reopening, the monument is hosting 2,000 visitors — less than one-tenth its capacity. For the people who dare visit, however, it's an extraordinary experience. The texture lost in a crowded space emerges like bas-relief when it is empty.

Does Islam permit abortion?



By: Laiq Ahmed Atif

Human life is so precious and sacrosanct that the Holy Quran resembles the killing of one as the killing of entire humanity. God says in the Holy Quran: "... Whosoever killed an innocent human being, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind" (5:33). This was further emphasised and elaborated by the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, during his last address known as the farewell address, where he said: "Your lives and your possessions have been made immune by God to attacks by one another until the Day of Judgment. God has made the lives, property and honour of every human sacred. To take any human being's life or property, or attack their honour is unjust and wrong." Furthermore, he presented a golden principle of human dignity and sacredness and said: "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." These are the guiding principles for me when I look towards the prevalent debate about terminating pregnancies and abortion on demand. Undoubtedly, every human life is sacred without any distinction, be it a one-day-old child or a child in the mother's womb. Whilst doing my research before writing this article, one of the most difficult subjects for me to write on, the mere thought of this subject inflicts pain and gloom on myself and many other lovers of humanity. I was therefore deeply surprised and saddened to see that there are so many countries that have legalised unconditional abortion. In the days before Islam, there lived certain tribes in Arabia which considered the birth of girls as a disgrace to their families and some of the chiefs used to kill the girls soon after their birth. They thought that they would save their honour by such an action. The Holy Prophet Muhammad abolished this cruel

custom and established the human dignity and elevated it to such a higher position. The Holy Quran has recorded this barbaric custom with extreme pain stating: "And when the girl-child buried alive is questioned about, 'for what crime was she killed?'" (81:9-10) Therefore the message is very clear that Islam believes in life, in human dignity and sacredness of human life. And that is what we should all uphold as a principle that every human life should be dealt with great dignity and sacredness as there is no doubt that life begins from the moment of conception. In the recent months, this debate is once gaining momentum in some countries, including Malta, and so many arguments and examples of other countries are being presented in favour of the legalisation of abortion. My humble and simple question is: Have countries where abortion is not a crime achieved the highest standards of human dignity? Have those countries succeeded in giving women their due rights? Does this mean that such countries have become immune to child abuse and violence against women? Are those countries free from every kind of abuse against women, such as rape and domestic violence? I doubt this is the case. Why then should we tread on the same unsuccessful path that has not bore the desired fruits and results? Why not decide once and for all that human life is sacred and is beyond the human domain. As far as Islam is concerned, it condemns abortion as also condemned by all world religions. Islam goes to great lengths to protect the sanctity of all human lives and views the practice of abortion as tantamount to taking the life of another human being. The Holy Quran also forbids abortions due to a fear of financial strain, God says: "Kill not your children for fear of poverty. It is We Who provide for them and for you. Surely, the killing of them is a

great sin.” (17:32) Reducing the honourable process of reproduction to an economic choice nullifies one of the main purposes of the institution of marriage and is against the spirit of Islamic teachings. However, when under the condition that a mother’s life or health is jeopardized by giving birth, Islam gives greater rights to the mother and abortion becomes permissible to save the life of the mother. Therefore, when a mother’s life is threatened, her life is given preference, and only on the basis of a medical exigency it is permissible. This exception is only on the medical grounds alone, and no other reason, logic and argument is entertained in the favour of abortion.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

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May Allah be with you - Amen

YouTube suspends Australian channel over ‘misinformation’



SYDNEY: YouTube said on Sunday it had barred Sky News Australia from uploading new content for one week, citing concerns about Covid-19 misinformation. The move comes after a review of posts uploaded by the Rupert Murdoch-owned TV channel, which has a substantial online presence. “We have clear and established Covid-19 medical misinformation policies to prevent the spread of Covid-19 misinformation that could cause real-world harm,” a YouTube statement said. With 1.86 million YouTube subscribers, the channel — which is owned by a subsidiary of Murdoch’s News Corp — has a conservative following well beyond Australia. Its posts, including some questioning whether there is a pandemic and the efficacy of vaccines, are widely shared on social media forums around the world that spread virus and vaccine misinformation. The last YouTube upload, from three days ago, features a host claiming that lockdowns have failed and criticising state authorities for extending Sydney’s current stay-at-home orders. Sky News confirmed the temporary ban and a spokesperson said “we support broad discussion and debate on a wide range of topics and perspectives which is vital to any democracy”.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1638264>

Quran Translations Reached Non-Muslims and Muslims outside Arab World Very Late

By: Sohail Arshad

The holy Quran was revealed to the prophet of Islam in the 7th century. But its translations in non-Arab languages were available only after the 11th century. The first translation of the Quran in any non-Arab language was in Turkish in the 11th century. The first translation of the Quran in any European languages was in Latin done in 1143 by Robert Ketenensis. He did the translation of the Quran only with the purpose of refuting it and not for promoting it. So he did wrong and misleading translations of words and verses. Later translations of the Quran in other European languages were inspired by the translation done by Ketenensis. Indeed earlier in the 9th century, translation of the Quran was done in Greek language. Though the famous Sahabi Hadhrat Salman Farsi r.a. had translated Surah Fatiha in Persian in the 7th century and Islam had reached Persia during the rule of Banu Umayyah, translation of the Quran was first done in the 10th century. A correct literal translation in Latin was done by Louis Maracci in 1698 but that was done only for the purpose of refutation of the Quran. The first French translation of the Quran by a Muslim was done in 1959. This shows how late Muslims realised the importance of translation of the Quran in other languages. In India though the Muslims reached very early and the first mosque ---Cheramam mosque --- was built in India during the life of prophet of Islam, Islam became dominant force in India in the 11th century with the establishment of Ghori dynasty in India in 1173. Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Bihar and Bengal in 1199-1200 and also established madrasa system in Bengal but the Quran and hadith were made available in Indian languages only during the rule of Mughal ruler Mohammad Shah Rangila

from 1738-39. Islamic scholar Shah Waliullah first translated the Quran in Persian language --the official language and the language of the elite in India in 1739. Interestingly Fatawa Alamgiri compiled during the rule of Aurangzeb was available in India before the translation of the Quran in India. This is perhaps the reason Indian Muslims attach more importance to fatwas than to the teachings of Quran and Hadith. Shah Waliullah faced fatwas of Kufr by contemporary ulema for translating the Quran in Persian. He was also attacked by some Muslims outside a mosque but he survived. Shah Waliullah had learnt Quran and Hadith from Islamic scholars of Quran and Hadith in Makkah and Madina. Therefore he popularised Quran and hadith among Indian Muslims. Prior to that Indian Muslims were not also fully aware of hadiths and many proverbs and popular sayings would be passed on as hadith. Shah Waliullah and his son Shah Abdul Aziz promoted true hadiths among Indian Muslims. Shah Waliullah's son Shah Abdul Qadir translated the Quran in Urdu in 1826, that is, during the East India Company's rule. But since translating and reading the Quran in Persian or Urdu, or in any Indian language for that matter was considered a sin by general Indian ulema, Muslims remained unaware of the true contents of the Quran for long though the Muslims were in government since the 12th century in India. Leave aside propagating the teachings of the Quran among non-Muslims, even common Muslims were not aware of the teachings of Quran and hadith. Muslims knew or understood Islam from selective literature published in Urdu and Persian by prominent Islamic scholars or through oral lectures delivered by Maulvis in madrasas. The translations of the Quran in Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, and Tamil etc. were

available only in the late 19th century. Ironically, the first Bengali translation of the Quran was done not by a Muslim but a Brahmo Samaj missionary Girish Chandra Sen in 1886. Though two Muslims had attempted Bengali translation of the Quran before him but their translations had remained incomplete. The first English translation in India was done by Dr Abul Fazl of India in 1910. He also studied the Quran in its chronological order for research purposes. All these accounts of translations of the Quran clearly show that though the Muslims conquered a large part of the world during the initial 2-3 centuries, they did not know the importance of translation in the spread of Islamic knowledge. Secondly the accuracy or sanctity of the message of the Quran was so deeply embedded in the Muslim psyche that they considered translating the Quran in other languages a sin. This mindset became a big obstacle in the spread of Quranic message in non-Muslim societies. The Europeans knew the importance of translation and so they translated the Quran before Muslims did to refute its contents before it reached their community. A correct translation of the Quran was done in Latin in as late as 1698 and that also by a Latin translator only from Catholic point of view. Muslims did not translate the Quran into Latin or other European languages to clear the doubts and confusion created about Quran and Islam by these erroneous translations done by Christian missionaries. Ignorance of the true teachings of the Quran and Hadiths were at the root of many unIslamic customs and rites among the Muslims of India. It was only in the 20th century that a comprehensive study of Quran was available in the most languages of the world. It is clear from these accounts that Muslim rulers did not contribute much to the spread of Islam but individual efforts were instrumental in the spread of religious knowledge in India. Therefore, the hypothesis that Islam has spread under the

shadow of sword proves wrong. Islam spread in India due to the peaceful efforts of Sufis. The learning and teaching of the Quran is still discouraged in India. Memorising the Quran without understanding its meaning is encouraged by religious institutions. Ignorance of Quranic teachings has led to sectarian beliefs among Muslim masses. In most Muslim households, the Quran is read without understanding its meaning only for Sawab and not for receiving guidance. The Muslim community has become largely detached from the Quran practically. The verses of Quran are recited only during sickness or death or in Chehlum and Chaliswan or during Ramadan for Sawab or for worldly benefits. Compilation of some selected Surahs called Pakistani Panjsurah or Solah surah are available. Surahs for repayment of debts, for recovery from illness, for victory over enemies, for warding off magic or evil spirits, for victory in court cases, for marriage etc. are compiled in these collections and Muslims recite only those Surahs for worldly benefits. The Quran is seldom read or studied for acquiring the knowledge of Deen though God has clearly said that He has made Quran easy to understand for those who seek knowledge *Wa Laqad Yassarnal Qur'ana Lizzikr Fahal Mim Muddakar* (Al Qamar: 17) In short, lack of translations of the Quran in world languages and unavailability of comprehensive introductory or exegetic literature on Islam for more than one thousand years from the advent of Islam caused a huge setback in the spread of true information about Islam among non-Muslims. Even today there is no systematic or organised effort for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge in the world. The vacuum is therefore exploited by sectarian and extremist individuals and organisations to spread their violent and sectarian ideology among Muslims.

<https://www.newageislam.com/islamic-society/quran-non-muslim-arab/d/124996>

Can The Saudi Regime Become Modern by Executing Minors?

By Arshad Alam

Saudi Regime Not Just Cuts up Journalists like Khashoggi, But Also Tortures and Kills Minors like Mustafa Hashem

Main Points:

- Saudi regime has executed a minor for his alleged involvement in terrorism.
- It lied to the UN human rights council that it will no longer execute children.
- The West and U.S are silent over this crack-down on dissent.
- Those who project MBS as the harbinger of Islamic reform, must understand that a genuine reform cannot come about without a certain degree of freedom for its citizens.

The Saudi regime not just cuts up journalists like Khashoggi, but is also fond of torturing and killing minors. Mustafa Hashem was recently executed on terrorism related charges. More specifically, he was charged with participating in protests against the Saudi government, killing a police officer and conspiring to detonate a bomb. The way the Saudi justice system works, it is very difficult to independently verify each of these charges. But given the propensity of the regime to equate any anti-government activity as terrorism and sedition, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that he was killed simply because of his participation in protests.

His family claims that he was detained in 2015 but released only to be arrested later because an 'objectionable' photo was found on his phone. Human rights groups across the world have condemned this execution and have pointed out that Hashem was a minor when he was arrested. They have pointed out that the Saudi government had committed that they will not execute minors but would rather commute all such cases to imprisonment. As late as 2021, the Saudis were stating before the UN Human Rights Council that 'anyone

who commits a death-eligible crime as a child will be subject to a maximum sentence of ten years in a juvenile detention'. Clearly then, the Saudis were lying because they did not adhere to their own promise. Or it could be that their definition of what constitutes a child differs from that of the United Nations. After all, according to Islamic law, the mark of adulthood is puberty. Who can forget that the Pakistani terrorists justified their killing of school children in 2014 by quoting various hadiths which equated adulthood with the onset of puberty? The defence of the Saudi establishment is that Hashem had confessed to being involved in terror activities. Coming from a totalitarian regime, no one should take this at face value. The fact is that Hashem was placed in solitary confinement and beaten so brutally that he lost consciousness several times. It was only to make the torture stop that he confessed to the charges against him. This is borne by the fact that he recanted his confession in court and told the judge that he did so because he was tortured. But then the sadist regime had already made up its mind to kill him and all his pleas fell on deaf ears. One wonders if there is any sense of the justice left in the country when it executes a teenager simply for participating in a protest. The regime did not even have the civility to inform the family of his death; they found it out through an online news portal. One does not know which photo Hashem had on his phone which riled the Saudi government so much. But the more important question no one is asking is how the Saudi police hacked into his phone to retrieve that photo? Which technology did they use? We know that only one country-Israel- has this capability and is more than willing to share it with its 'friends'. The new found friendship between Israel and

Koh-i-noor diamond

Koh-i-noor, (Persian: “Mountain of Light”) , also spelled Kūh-e Nūr, the diamond with the longest history for an extant stone, though its early history is controversial. Originally a lumpy Mughal-cut stone that lacked fire and weighed 191 carats, it was recut to enhance its fire and brilliance to a 105.6-carat shallow oval brilliant in 1852 at Garrard of London, the royal jeweler, with indifferent results.

Some sources note that the first references to the diamond, which later became known as the Koh-i-noor, appeared in Sanskrit and possibly even Mesopotamian texts as early as 3200 BCE, but this claim is controversial. In contrast, some experts claim that Sultan ‘Alā’-ud-Dīn Khaljī took the jewel in 1304 from the raja of Malwa, India, whose family had owned it for many generations. Other writers have identified the Koh-i-noor with the diamond given to the son of Bābur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, by the raja of Gwalior after the battle of Panipat in 1526. Still others have contended that it came originally from the Kollur mine of the Krishna River and was presented to the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān in 1656. Some claim that the stone was cut from the Great Mogul diamond described by the French jewel trader Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in 1665, but the Koh-i-noor’s original lack of fire and shape make that unlikely. In any case, it most likely formed part of the loot of Nāder Shāh of Iran when he sacked Delhi in 1739. After his death it fell into the hands of his general, Aḥmad Shāh, founder of the Durrānī dynasty of Afghans. His descendant Shāh Shoḡā’, when a fugitive in India, was forced to surrender the stone to Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler. On the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the Koh-i-noor was acquired by the British and was placed among the crown jewels of Queen Victoria. It was incorporated as the central stone in the queen’s state crown fashioned for use by Queen Elizabeth, consort of George VI, at her coronation in 1937. The Koh-i-noor remains part of this crown.

Saudi Arabia now makes perfect sense because it gives the latter access to technology through which it can monitor and surveil its own people. The Saudi-Israel friendship is nothing but an attempt to put together a new apparatus of coercion for Saudi people as the regime is fearful that sooner or later, the Arab Spring will also come to them. The Saudi Prince, popularly known as MBS, is trying to convince the world that he is ushering in liberal changes in the kingdom. Recently, he ‘allowed’ Muslim women to perform Hajj without a male guardian. Hailed as a revolutionary moment, this would place the Saudis in the 10th century rather than make it a modern country. Any modern civilized society makes way for difference of opinion but the Saudi monarchs are terribly afraid of their people finding a voice. It is this fear that is making them execute people without any remorse. In 2019, the Saudi government executed 37 citizens which included 34 Shias, in a mass execution for alleged terrorism related crimes. Of these, 6 were confirmed cases of child execution. Back in 2016, the regime had executed 47 people in one day, again on terrorism related charges. The paragons of human rights, the liberal west, have maintained continued silence on the atrocities committed by the Saudi state on its own people. It is shameful that the Saudi regime has not even earned a censure from these countries for its crack-down on dissent of any form. Those who see a ray of hope in MBS forget that genuine reform in the kingdom cannot come without trusting its own people. Citizens have to be taken on board and wide discussions must precede any viable change which is being planned. MBS cannot continue to bulldoze any criticism of his regime while at the same time proclaim himself to be the harbinger of a new dawn in the Islamic emirate. This is sheer hypocrisy and the sooner his propagandists see this the better it will be for the future of that country.

Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi: Iraq does not need US combat troops

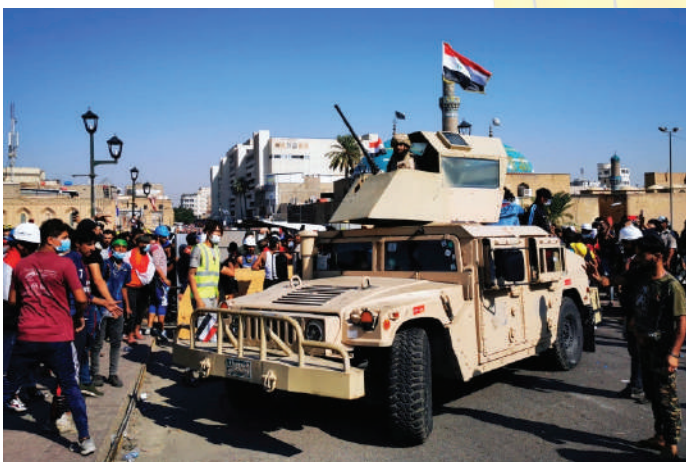
Iraq's prime minister has said his country no longer requires American combat troops to fight ISIL (ISIS), but a formal timeframe for their redeployment will depend on the outcome of talks with US officials this week.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi said in an interview with The Associated Press news agency that Iraq will still ask for US training and military intelligence gathering, but will seek a timeline for the withdrawal of combat troops, which was announced in April amid ongoing talks between Washington and Baghdad. "There is no need for any foreign combat forces on Iraqi soil," he said in the interview published on Sunday before a planned trip to Washington, where he is slated to meet President Joe Biden on Monday for a fourth round of strategic talks. "The war against IS [ISIL] and the readiness of our forces requires a special timetable, and this depends on the negotiations that we will conduct in Washington," he added. Al-Kadhimi will visit the White House amid growing pressure, particularly from Shia political groups, for a reduced US role in the country. That sentiment has been stoked by the US-directed drone attack that killed powerful Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis on Iraqi soil last year. Increased attacks by Iran-aligned militias in Iraq on US installations has further underscored



al-Kadhimi's limited control over powerful actors in Iraq. Meanwhile, the threat of an ISIL resurgence remains ever-present in Iraq, with al-Kadhimi careful to stress Baghdad is not seeking a full withdrawal. "What we want from the US presence in Iraq is to support our forces in training and developing their efficiency and capabilities, and in security cooperation," al-Kadhimi said. "Iraq has a set of American weapons that need maintenance and training. We will ask the American side to continue to support our forces and develop our capabilities," he said. The US troop presence has stood at about 2,500 since late last year when then-President Donald Trump ordered a reduction from 3,000. Previously, former President Barrack Obama had withdrawn US forces from Iraq in 2011, creating a security vacuum that aided the rise of ISIL. US troops were redeployed in 2014. It remains unclear exactly how Washington and Baghdad are defining combat troops and how many troops would actually be redeployed under the plan. US and coalition officials have maintained that US troops are no longer accompanying Iraqi forces on ground missions and that coalition assistance is limited to intelligence gathering and surveillance and the deployment of advanced military technologies.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/25/iraqi-pm-al-kadhimi-iraq-does-not-need-us-combat-troops>



Prospects and Challenges for Pakistan in Afghan Peace Process.

By: **Hifza Komal Pirzada**



Afghanistan emerged as a significant security concern after the September 11, 2021 attacks for the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the military campaign against Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban government in Afghanistan that harbored terrorists and supported terrorism supposedly. American forces have suffered around 2,400 fatalities and over 22,000 casualties during the twenty years war on terror in Afghanistan. However, the United States emerged as a victor after an elected government replaced Afghan Taliban government in Afghanistan after Taliban ouster in 2001. That elected government could not sustain the military might of Afghan Taliban and bloody conflicts dominated the Afghanistan arena during past two decades. The two decades of unprecedented conflict forced the American civilian leadership to conclude that military option is not insuring peace in Afghanistan. The United States under Trump Administration initiated peace talks with Afghan Taliban with the help of Pakistani government in October, 2018. Both parties met nine times in Doha, Qatar to reach an agreement for peace in Afghanistan. The first-ever documented accord was signed on February 29, 2020 in Doha between the United States and Taliban. The Trump Administration had committed to withdrawing military forces from Afghanistan by May, 2021 in a February 2020 agreement with Afghan Taliban. Taliban reciprocated by committing to prevent Al-Qaeda and other groups from using Afghan soil to recruit, train and fund-raise toward activities that threaten the United States and its allies. According to the United States' officials the Afghan Taliban have not fulfilled their commitments as the violence has increased between the Kabul government and Taliban, and the United Nations sanctions monitors Taliban links with other terrorist outfits like Al-Qaeda still remain in place.

The peace initiative focused on three main issues to ensure peace in Afghanistan; Taliban would talk to the Afghan government to reach a political settlement, Taliban will not allow any terrorist outfit to use Afghan soil against the United States or its allies and would fight against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Afghanistan and the last agenda of peace talks included commitments from the United States and Taliban not to wage war against foreign troops and in return the foreign forces will not hit the Taliban sanctuaries. The United States' forces left the key base Bagram Airfield in Kabul in the dead of the night without notifying base's commander on July 2, 2021. Taliban has made swift advance in recent weeks across the country by seizing rural areas and some larger urban cities. The late-night withdrawal by the United States hands control of the base to a much-less well-equipped Afghan force that could struggle to defend Bagram Airfield and a prison inside base that accommodates 5,000 Taliban prisoners. The United States, regional and international players appreciated the role of Pakistan in Afghan peace process to bring Taliban to the table in Doha, Qatar. Pakistan has not enjoyed friendly relations with Afghan government after the fall of Taliban regime in 2001 in Afghanistan. Both countries have often locked horns over the porous border situation and infiltration of terrorists across Durand Line. Afghan government accuses Islamabad of using Taliban against the former and Pakistan has showed continuous concern over recruitment and training of anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan by Indian Intelligence Agency Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). Afghan government is also annoyed with border fencing at Pakistan-Afghanistan border. These issues are the main constraints of bitter bilateral relations between two neighbors. However, Pakistan

has invested enormous efforts to bring all stakeholders to negotiate an accord for enduring peace in Afghanistan despite of Afghan government's relentless accusations on Islamabad. The situation is getting out of control after the withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan. As Moeed Yusuf, the National Security Adviser (NSA) to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan said if there is no peace in Afghanistan, there would be no peace in Pakistan either and rightly so. It has been witnessed by the international community that the pullout of military forces from Afghanistan has advantaged Taliban to expand its influence and violence across the country. There is concern in Pakistan over the chances of breaking out a civil war as Afghanistan does not have just two entities; Afghan government and Taliban. Afghanistan is a diverse country having numerous tribes that can compete with Afghan Taliban to control respective territories. Furthermore, ISIS, Al-Qaeda and various terrorist outfits are engaged in violence to secure influence in Afghanistan. The power-sharing of different Afghan factions is a reasonable solution to avert civil war in Afghanistan. The Afghan government and Taliban were supposed to have talks to reach a political and peace settlement, but both parties have reservations against each other. The flare-up of civil war in Afghanistan would have spillover effect on Pakistan that would eventually lead to migration of some seven hundred thousand Afghans to Pakistan. Pakistan has suffered the most because of the Afghanistan conundrum. It has sacrificed nearly one hundred thousand lives and also hosting nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees who have fled from Afghanistan to escape violence. Pakistan has lost influence over Afghan Taliban, and there is a strong anticipation of the number of Afghan refugees entering Pakistan to swell in the aftermath of the Taliban onslaught. The flow of Afghan migrants towards Pakistan is imminent. Pakistani government announced to shut doors to the refugees initially but later on it was confirmed that preparation has been

made on the border areas to confine refugees to the camps. Pakistan cannot bear the refugee burden further and also the threat to national security as it is feared that terrorists may penetrate in Pakistani territory in the garb of Afghan refugees. Moreover, Afghan refugees who came temporarily to Pakistan to escape war in Afghanistan during Soviet invasion after 1979 and then the beginning of war on terror in 2001 by the United States have not left Pakistan. The fears of terrorists' infiltration and permanent settlement of Afghans in Pakistan have made Pakistani government reluctant to host more Afghan refugees. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not agreeing on the terms of confining refugees in border adjacent camps, subsequently creating security dilemma and burdening Pakistan's limited financial resources. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has great potential for South Asian and Central Asian countries. Both regions can benefit greatly from Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) but it is completely dependent on security situation in Afghanistan that would connect South Asia with Central Asia. Pakistan faces challenges to CPEC and regional connectivity due to ongoing chaos in Afghanistan. Pakistan wants a peaceful Afghanistan to improve regional connectivity and subsequently advantageous economy. After the Taliban regime, India invested almost three billion dollars in Afghanistan to improve its soft image. Pakistan believes India is investing in Afghanistan to wage proxy war against Pakistan and initiating a water war between Pakistan and Afghanistan, eventually squeezing water resources of Pakistan. India has established strong ties with all the stakeholders in Afghanistan except Afghan Taliban but the former is accepting the Taliban reality. India considers Taliban a real threat to its investment in Afghanistan, hence, India has started engaging with Taliban behind doors since June, 2021. These challenges are constant concerns of Pakistan regarding Afghanistan.

Palestine: 2100 Israeli settlers storm Al-Aqsa complex



JERUSALEM (AA): More than 2,100 Israeli settlers forced their way into the flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque complex on Sunday, according to a Palestinian agency. In a statement, the Islamic Endowment Department in Jerusalem said that 2,100 settlers with Israeli soldiers broke into the complex through its Israeli-controlled Al-Mughrabi Gate, southwest of the mosque, and performed their rituals inside. According to eyewitnesses, groups of settlers attempted to storm the complex through the Bab Huta Gate and King Faisal Gate but were confronted by Palestinian worshippers. The soldiers assaulted dozens of worshippers, before surrounding the al-Qibli mosque in the Al-Aqsa compound and cut its wires to prevent the calls for prayer. Eyewitnesses said the soldiers surrounded the al-Qibli mosque while dozens of worshippers were in it, and sealed its gate with iron chains, before assaulting dozens of Palestinians in Al-Aqsa, and abducted many others. The Islamic Waqf Department in Jerusalem said the invasion was led by the head of the right-wing Otzma Yehudit party, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and the right-wing Likud member and former Member of Knesset Yehuda Glick. It added that the soldiers and the police started assaulting the Palestinian worshippers in the

holy site, and forced many of them away, in addition to abducting many others. The soldiers also fired gas bombs and concussion grenades at the worshippers and chased many of them away. Earlier Sunday, Israeli forces shut all entrances and gates to the Al-Aqsa complex. Israeli settler groups have called on supporters to force their way into Al-Aqsa complex in large numbers on Sunday to mark what they call the “destruction of the temple” in ancient times. The so-called Sovereignty Movement in Israel is also preparing to organize a march for settlers around the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem on the same day. On Saturday, hundreds of settlers staged a march in occupied East Jerusalem ahead of their planned incursions on Sunday. Al-Aqsa Mosque is the world’s third-holiest site for Muslims. Jews call the area the “Temple Mount,” claiming it was the site of two Jewish temples in ancient times. Israel occupied East Jerusalem, where al-Aqsa is located, during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It annexed the entire city in 1980, in a move never recognized by the international community. * Ahmed Asmar contributed to this report from Ankara.

<https://muslimnews.co.uk/news/palestine/palestine-2100-israeli-settlers-storm-al-aqsa-complex/>

FO rubbishes 'baseless' Indian claims about EU Parliament withdrawing Pakistan's GSP+ status

By: Naveed Siddiqui

The Foreign Office (FO) has rubbished Indian media's claims that Pakistan's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status was being withdrawn, calling such reports "fabricated" and a continuation of New Delhi's "malicious propaganda" against Islamabad. While the FO statement did not name the specific media report it was referring to, the rebuttal comes after Indian news agency ANI reported on July 26 that the European Parliament had moved to withdraw Pakistan's GSP+ status over "abuse of blasphemy laws".

In response, FO spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudri, in a statement issued late on Tuesday, said that the news item was "fabricated and a continuation of the India's malicious propaganda against Pakistan". "India's malicious smear campaign against Pakistan is well-known and independent organisations, including EU DisinfoLab, have established India's credentials as [a] purveyor of anti-Pakistan propaganda globally," he said.

Read: Indian network lobbying against Pakistan exposed

He said that the Indian state and "obliging" Indian media remained busy "concocting baseless stories against Pakistan" despite the unearthing of India's disinformation campaign.

"The recent rumours are yet another demonstration of India's nefarious designs," he said.

The spokesman said that Pakistan and the European Union maintain close high-level engagement through multiple dialogue mechanisms, adding that the country remains committed to the full implementation of the 27 international conventions related to the preferential trade regime.

"Pakistan has successfully completed three biennial reviews of GSP+ and the fourth biennial review is currently under way.

"Currently, the European parliament is on summer recess till autumn and there has been no discussion on Pakistan since April," the FO spokesman concluded.

The GSP+ is a special trading arrangement that provides developing countries preferential access to European markets by slashing tariffs to zero on most products.

The countries benefiting from the scheme have to implement 27 international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, protection of the environment and good governance.

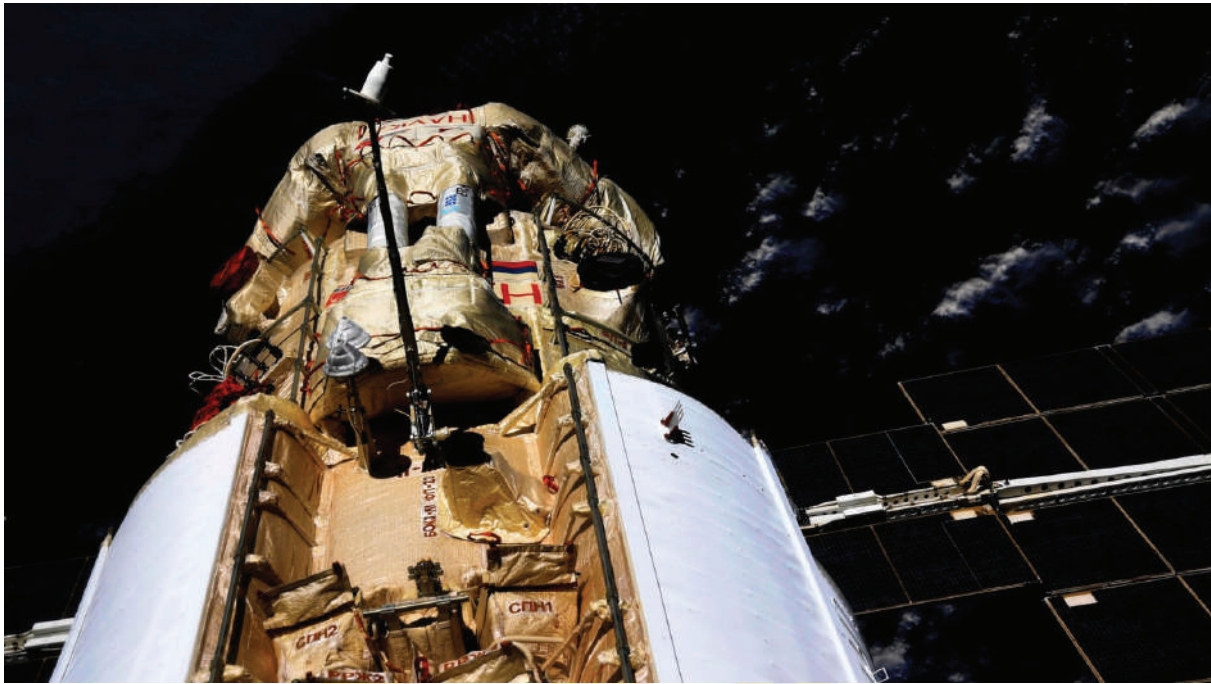
Pakistan, which has ratified all 27 conventions, has been benefiting from the GSP+ status since January 2014. Its GSP+ status was extended for another two years in March 2020.

However, the European Parliament in April adopted a resolution calling for a review of the GSP+ status granted to Pakistan in view of an "alarming" increase in the use of blasphemy accusations in the country as well as rising number of online and offline attacks on journalists and civil society organisations.

The resolution also called on the government to "unequivocally condemn" incitement to violence and discrimination against religious minorities in the country.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1637404>

International Space Station knocked out of position as new Russian science lab malfunctions



The International Space Station has been knocked out of position after a Russian science lab malfunctioned. The newly arrived lab accidentally fired its thrusters, resulting in the ISS losing control of its orientation for 47 minutes, NASA said.

Russian cosmonauts had been checking for leaks between the 22-tonne lab - named Nauka - and the service module, when automatic sensors on the ground detected the problem. Communication between the station and ground controllers was also cut twice for a few minutes. NASA said that the crew was "never and is not in any danger", adding that ground teams had regained control and the "motion of the space station is stable".

Joel Montalbano, manager of NASA's space station programme, said that, at the height of the incident, the ISS was pitching out of alignment at the rate of about half a degree per second. The crew "really didn't feel any movement", he added. Russian space officials were also unfazed, with Dmitry Rogozin, head of Roscosmos, tweeting: "All in order at the ISS. The crew is resting, which is what I advise you to do as well." It is not yet clear why Nauka's thrusters malfunctioned.

The 13m-long lab launched from Kazakhstan last week, taking eight days to reach the ISS, where it will provide more space for scientific experiments. It had been due for launch in 2007 but was delayed due to numerous technical problems, including contamination in its fuel system in 2013.

It will now need various manoeuvres, including up to 11 spacewalks, before it is ready to be used. The incident prompted NASA to postpone the 3 August test flight for a Boeing capsule from Florida. Boeing was set to make its second attempt to reach the 250-mile-high ISS after software problems ruined the first test. The ISS is currently being operated by NASA astronauts Mark Vande Hei, Shane Kimbrough and Megan McArthur; Oleg Novitsky and Pyotr Dubrov of Russia's Roscosmos; Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Akihiko Hoshide and European Space Agency astronaut Thomas Pesquet.

<https://news.sky.com/story/international-space-station-knocked-out-of-position-as-new-russian-science-lab-malfunctions-12367612>