

EU, Central Asian states and Afghanistan hold annual political and security dialogue



KABUL: The eighth High-Level Political and Security Dialogue between the European Union (EU) and the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan

and Uzbekistan) took place in Tashkent on July 1, with the participation of Afghanistan's special guest, according to the EU.

Iraq vows to pay debts to Iran for imported energy

TEHRAN - The Iraqi prime minister, while emphasizing Iraq's commitment to pay its debts for the import of electricity and gas from Iran, stated that Iran has not failed to export electricity and gas to Iraq.

Iraq has not neglected to export electricity and gas to Iran," Mustafa Al-Kadhimi made the remarks in an emergency meeting with governors in which members of the Electricity Crisis Resolution Committee were also present. Al-Kadhimi and high-ranking Iranian officials met in Baghdad to discuss the electricity crisis.

Strongly, 61 power grids have experienced a long, resulting in 18 deaths. Al-Kadhimi says targeting power grids is not normal. "We have seen power outages in recent days," he said.

He added, "Who is targeting the power grid? Who is it being targeted? As soon as the investigation is completed, we will answer the question. Why are the saboteurs targeting the electricity transmission network? Is this sabotage operation against the energy transmission network politically motivated or an act of terrorism?"

The prime minister said he has differentiated the current situation. "The government is putting the price for wrong policies and patchwork and waste of public funds during the last 17 years in all fields, especially in the field of energy," he added.

The prime minister said speaking to the public and transparency is a historical and moral responsibility. "We must speak to the people openly, especially after successive governments have not spoken to the people out of fear of public anger. The fact is that everyone, including governments and politicians, has the responsibility," he remarked.

What is the reason for not connecting power lines with neighboring countries as well as the world over the last 17 years?" he asked. Al-Kadhimi said that Iraq is only connected to the electricity grid of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which does not fail to transfer electricity to Iraq based on its ability, and is also committed to the Iraqi people.

There is also a case of electricity import from Tehran and the U.S. sanctions. We are nervous about the issue and the payment of all Iraq debts in Iran for the import of gas and electricity in the last years, and we will make progress in this regard," the prime minister highlighted.

"In the gas case, the Iraq gas network is connected to Iran, and despite the difficulties in receiving

ing their demands due to sanctions, they have not stopped and continue to export gas to Iraq. We need more time to find resources," he said.

He added that Iraq is looking to replace gas from other countries.

Problem solving is time-consuming. Al-Kadhimi added, "Why the Iraqi government should be deprived of satisfying the pressing needs of its own people? From a year ago until now, we have made decisions to connect the Iraq electricity systems to all neighboring countries. This requires time and patience to complete so that we can meet the challenges."

The prime minister added that under normal circumstances, the electricity grid is supposed to be connected to the neighboring countries, but Iraq puts forward the question of who decided to isolate Iraq and prevent the connection of the power lines with other countries?

Why not work on solar or nuclear energy?"

On the issue of a possible cooperation with France to develop Iraq's nuclear energy, Al-Kadhimi said, "Policy makers in every country formulate a strategy based on their future, capabilities and plans, so why in the last 17 years have we built dozens of gas-fired power plants to generate electricity while we do not have the capacity to supply gas or a plan to produce gas or diversify gas import sources if needed? Who is responsible for such a big mistake? Why did we fail to focus on solar or even nuclear energy?"

A few months ago, I talked about the French officials regarding nuclear power project in Iraq," he added.

The Iraq Iraq official said that Iraq is a world community, including France, has a good group that there are obstacles that Iraq must overcome.

"Over the last year, my administration has done everything it should have done," he added. We need 2 to 3 years.

"Iraq has a long delay in gas production and we need to meet producing gas immediately, and we did that, but we need 2 to 3 years to start gas production and cover most of the needs of our power plants," Al-Kadhimi said.

He remarked, "All the necessary measures to solve the electricity problem in Iraq will take several years. We had discussed in solar energy in gas production as well as power plants. We would not have electricity problems now and instead of reporting, we would expect gas."

Participants expressed their shared concern about recurring violence in Afghanistan and stressed their common determination to continue to work together to promote a genuine and inclusive process to work together.

The EU confirmed that the key priorities of its strategy on Central Asia of 2019 would guide the preparation of its 2021-2027 budget cycle 2021-2027.

The EU welcomed the upcoming conference on Central Asia-South Asia connectivity to be held in Tashkent from July 15 to 16, which would provide space for reinforcing international support for Central Asian states, Afghanistan and their neighbors more closely as a key factor for peace, resilience and prosperity.

Participants agreed to work together to organize a first EU-Central Asia Economic Forum, EU-Central Asia Conference on Tourism and third EU-Central Asia Civil Society Forum by the end of this year. The EU welcomed the proposal to organize a high-level dialogue on connectivity in 2022.

The Kabul Times

India's opposition demands parliamentary probe of Rafale deal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political opponents stopped by their demands for a probe into India's purchase of Rafale combat jets after France reportedly launched a political investigation into allegations of corruption in the deal.

The Indian National Congress party on Sunday called for an investigation into the allegations, including charges in the term of the contract for the 2016 purchase of 36 fighters from Dassault Aviation SA. The renewed demands followed a report that France's financial prosecutor is starting a probe based on a complaint filed by French non-governmental organization Sherpa,

which said in a statement that it suspects "corruption, favoritism and various financial forces" may have occurred.

The Congress party has asked that a "fair and impartial inquiry committee be constituted immediately and carry out an investigation into the aspects of the Rafale deal he investigated," spokesman Pawan Khera said in a press conference in New Delhi.

The Indian party led by Rahul Gandhi has alleged that Dassault Aviation SA, a French aircraft manufacturer, secured the 36 jets at a higher price.

It has also claimed that Modi's government forced

Dassault to partner with businessman Anil Ambani's Reliance Group as a condition of the contract.

Ambani and the Modi government's alleged all-India campaign of wrongdoing.

The Indian prime minister's didn't respond to email seeking comment. The French financial prosecutor's office didn't return a call or respond to messages by phone and email.

Dassault has acted in compliance with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Anti-Bribery Convention and national laws, the French plane maker said in April.



Emirates suspends flights from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka till July 15

Emirates has suspended flights from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka till July 15 in accordance with the directives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government, the airline said in a statement on Sunday.

It also said that passengers who have connected through these countries in the last 14 days would not be allowed to travel with the airline from any point in the UAE.

National, holders of UAE Golden Visa and members of diplomatic missions who come with special Covid-19 protocols are exempt and may be required for travel," the statement said.

Emirates said that people who had already booked their tickets could keep them for their flight or rebook to another date.

Last month, the UAE had extended a ban on inbound flights from 14 countries including Pakistan till July 21.

The UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) had said in a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) that flights from 14 countries, including Pakistan, would remain suspended until July 21, 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, it said cargo flights, as well as business and charter flights would be exempt from the suspension.

Emirates is one of the airlines that have recently been issued a warning by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) over inconsistent case management by the "authorities of flight".

Preventing case of travel restrictions by the authorities, some airlines had scheduled extra flights to Pakistan and made bookings as well but then cancelled those flights after the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) mandated travel curbs

considering the rise in Covid cases in some areas.

The CAA said it had taken various action against Qatar Airways, Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Fly Dubai for causing inconvenience to passengers by flight cancellations in recent weeks.

As for earlier, the CAA directed the airlines to accommodate the passengers on the earliest possible flights of the same or any other airlines to Pakistan besides providing food accommodation and payment of damages to passengers.

The CAA also cautioned airlines that it would be constrained to initiate regulatory action against them, which may include financial penalty, cancellation of one or more flights and revocation of schedule authorisation.

Meanwhile, Aviation Minister Chaudhary Nawaz Sharif shared on Sunday that the CAA and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) had decided to operate 18 flights to Gulf countries, including the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain to replace suspended Pakistan citizens.

For the UAE, 10 flights will operate between July 1 and 10, bringing back 2,394 Pakistani from Dubai and Sharjah. Six flights will operate between July 11 and 15, bringing back 2,016 people from Pakistan.

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Tajik COVID task force orders everyone over 18 to get vaccinated

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Tajikistan's coronavirus task force has ordered all citizens over the age of 18 to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The Central Asian country's state media reported on July 5.

"Coronavirus vaccination is mandatory for citizens over 18 years," the task force said, according to the Khovar news agency.

It added that citizens should book an appointment with their doctor or their local clinic to receive free vaccination. Until now, vaccination was optional in the country. The task force and the mandatory vaccination order was to counter the spread of COVID-19 in Tajikistan.

It also called on citizens returning to Tajikistan from abroad and visitors to isolate for 10 days even if they test negative, Khovar reported.

In addition, it encouraged citizens to limit the size of wedding and other events to the fewest number of people, but it didn't specify a number.

The statement came amid the rapid spread of a new strain of coronavirus in the country, though official statistics show the number of new cases remains low.

According to the Ministry of Health, 23 new cases of infection were detected on July 2 and two people died.

