

Headlines:

- **Afghan Economy Nears Collapse as Pressure Builds to Ease U.S. Sanctions**
- **Pakistan May Attend US Democracy Summit**
- **U.S. Lawmakers Defy China by Meeting with Officials in Taiwan**

Details:

Afghan Economy Nears Collapse as Pressure Builds to Ease U.S. Sanctions

As the country edges to the brink of collapse, the international community is scrambling to resolve a politically and legally fraught dilemma: How can it meet its humanitarian obligations without bolstering the new regime or putting money directly into the Taliban's hands? In recent weeks, the United States and the European Union have pledged to provide \$1.29 billion more in aid to Afghanistan and to Afghan refugees in neighboring countries. But aid can do only so much to fend off a humanitarian catastrophe if the economy continues to crumble, economists and aid organizations warn. "No humanitarian crisis can be managed by humanitarian support only," said Abdallah Al Dardari, the United Nations Development Program's resident representative in Afghanistan. "If we lose these systems in the next few months, it will not be easy to rebuild them to serve the essential needs of the country. We are witnessing a rapid deterioration to the point of no return." Under the previous government, foreign aid accounted for around 45 percent of the country's G.D.P. and funded 75 percent of the government's budget, including health and education services. But after the Taliban seized power, the Biden administration froze the country's \$9.5 billion in foreign reserves and stopped sending the shipments of U.S. dollars upon which Afghanistan's central bank relied. The scale and speed of the collapse amounts to one of the largest economic shocks any country has experienced in recent history, economists say. Last month, the International Monetary Fund warned that the economy is set to contract up to 30 percent this year. By the middle of next year, as much as 97 percent of the Afghan population could sink below the poverty line, according to an analysis by the United Nations Development Program. Many people who were already living hand-to-mouth have been pushed over the edge. [Source: New York].

The Taliban swiftly took power but did not pay enough attention on how to rule and what to rule by. Instead, they were eager to preoccupy themselves on the ministries, and totally ignored how the US and the West controlled the country's economy.

Pakistan May Attend US Democracy Summit

The US State Department on Friday issued the final list of the nations invited to the Summit of Democracy Washington is hosting on Dec 9-10 and the list includes Pakistan. Diplomatic observers in Washington say that Pakistan is likely to participate in the 110-nation virtual summit, as it will boost its efforts to re-establish economic and political ties with the United States, which, until recently, was a close ally. "Prime Minister Imran Khan, who visited the United States in July 2019, will address the summit as well, if Pakistan agrees to participate," a diplomatic source said. Those invited can confirm their participation by the end of next week. Observers say that Pakistan might consult China before announcing its participation as the US decision to invite Taiwan, instead of Beijing, has angered China. China's Foreign Ministry said earlier this week that it was "firmly opposed" to the invitation. "US actions only go to show democracy is just a cover and a tool for it to advance its geopolitical objectives, oppress other countries, divide the world and serve its own interests," Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing. Observers in Washington acknowledge that the invitation puts Pakistan in a difficult spot as it also fears giving India a free hand by opting out of the summit. Pakistan is worried about India's growing influence in the United States since 2011, when Osama bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad strained Islamabad's relations with Washington. From South Asia, the United States

has invited both India and Pakistan but has kept Bangladesh out. Nepal has been invited too, although Sri Lanka is out. Observers say the invitations show that American interests in the region played a key role in making the guest list. Three invitees — India, Pakistan and Nepal — have borders with China and the US wants to maintain friendly ties with them to counter China's growing influence. Apparently, strategic interests persuaded Washington to ignore concerns for democracy while inviting these three nations to the summit. As expected, the Taliban-run Afghanistan is out too. Washington wants Kabul to form an inclusive government and undertake major social and political reforms, if it wants US recognition. Russia has also been kept out of the summit, although both China and Russia are major world powers. With almost 1.40 billion people, China is the world's most populous country, followed by India with almost 1.34bn people. Russia is the largest country by far, with a total area of about 17 million square kilometres. China is also the fourth-largest in area, after Russia, Canada, and the United States. Two major Middle East nations — Turkey and Iran — are also out of the summit, although Iraq has been invited. Azerbaijan, which has a land dispute with Armenia, is out too, although Armenia has been invited. Azerbaijan has an authoritarian regime, as do other Middle Eastern and Central Asian nations. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also out, apparently for being kingdoms, although the United Kingdom, a constitutional monarchy, is on the list. [Source: Dawn]

Imran Khan often talks about making Pakistan into the state of Madina, but he still promotes the concept of democracy which is alien to Islam. In Islam, Allah (swt) is the Legislator, whereas in democracy man legislates and this is *shirk*.

U.S. Lawmakers Defy China by Meeting with Officials in Taiwan

Five U.S. lawmakers arrived in Taiwan on Thursday to meet with government officials, defying an admonition from Beijing to stay away from the hotly contested democratic island. "When news of our trip broke yesterday, my office received a blunt message from the Chinese Embassy, telling me to call off the trip," Rep Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., wrote on Twitter. "The auto industry's largest supplier of microchips is here in Taiwan, so supply chain issues will most definitely be on the agenda." Slotkin's office later shared with NBC News excerpts of a letter it said it received from the embassy on Wednesday. "We strongly urge the Congresswoman immediately cancel the planned visit to Taiwan, and not to support and embolden separatist forces of 'Taiwan independence,' lest it cause huge damage to the China-US relations and the peace and stability of Taiwan Straits," the embassy wrote. The embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The bipartisan delegation that arrived Thursday, led by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano, D-Calif., included fellow panel members Slotkin and Reps. Colin Allred, D-Texas and Nancy Mace, R-S.C., as well as Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif., according to Reuters, which first reported the trip. American support for Taiwan's military and the elevation of unofficial relations with Taiwan in recent years has strained U.S.-China relations. China lays claim to Taiwan and does not have official ties with countries that recognize the autonomous island as an independent nation. As a result, the U.S. does not officially recognize Taiwan, nor does it maintain an embassy there. Still, the U.S. has upgraded its relationship with Taiwan over the last several years, including through a consular agreement, continued support for Taiwan's security and visits from U.S. officials. An earlier trip by members of Congress led to the Chinese responding with military exercises near Taiwan. The U.S. posture toward China's relationship with Taiwan is one of "strategic ambiguity," which is designed to leave open the question of how Washington would respond to either a Chinese attack on Taiwan or a siege. President Joe Biden said at a CNN town hall meeting in October that the U.S. would defend Taiwan against an attack, but the White House quickly clarified that there was no change in U.S. policy. [Source: NBC]

The US is testing China's patience and setting red lines, which Beijing will find difficult to cross. Unless, China changes its passive behaviour and adopts a political will to challenge the US, Biden will continue to press China further.