

Afghan Taliban hold first, closed-door talks with EU on deportations

BRUSSELS, June 23 (AP)

A DELEGATION from the Afghan Taliban met on Tuesday with European Union staff in Brussels for closed-door talks that focused on diplomatic services and the “dignified returns” of Afghans to the isolated and war-ravaged nation, a Taliban official said.

Afghans make up one of the largest groups of migrants seeking asylum in the EU, but a growing number of governments in the 27-nation bloc want to speed up and increase deportations for those whose claims are rejected or who commit crimes in their host countries.

Abdul Qahar Balkhi called the visit “historic,” noting it was the first time a delegation from the

Islamic Emirate held talks with the EU and EU nations in Brussels. Balkhi, who led the delegation of five, said talks focused on “trust-building measures,” the Taliban’s diplomatic presence in the EU and a “dignified return process.” The meeting was held in an undisclosed location in the Belgian capital, where both the EU and NATO are headquartered.

The Commission said it co-chaired the meeting with Sweden and that representatives from 15 of the EU’s 27 nations participated in discussions focused on easing deportations of criminals and security threats.

Afghan authorities have imposed draconian restrictions on rights, particularly for women and girls, since the Taliban seized

power in the country in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led forces.

Rights groups said Tuesday’s meeting undercuts the EU’s human rights obligations and could endanger people in Europe and Afghanistan.

“Any engagement with the Taliban needs to prioritize protecting human rights and accountability - not deporting people to danger there,” said Fereshta Abbasi, a researcher at Human Rights Watch.

“EU countries are undermining their credibility by condemning Taliban abuses and pursuing accountability on one hand, while cooperating with the Taliban to forcibly return Afghans on the other.”

India-China are partners, not rivals: Wang



NSA Ajit Doval welcomes Chinese FM Wang Yi at the 16th BRICS National Security Advisers' Meeting, in New Delhi on Tuesday. (ANI)

BEIJING, June 23 (PTI)

CHINESE Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said that it is "imperative" for India and China to respect each other's "core interests" and take concrete actions to implement the "important consensus" reached by the leaders of both countries.

Wang, who is in New Delhi to attend the BRICS NSA conference, made the remarks during his meeting with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval on Monday, according to China's state-run Xinhua news agency.

During their meeting, Wang

and Doval discussed the bilateral relations and progress of the normalisation process.

Both Wang and Doval are the Special Representatives of the India-China border issue. India is an important neighbour of China, and bilateral relations have returned to the track of recovery and improvement, said Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the ruling Communist Party of China and Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs.

Wang noted that the leaders of the two countries agreed that China and India are part-

ners instead of rivals, thus forming the most important strategic consensus between the two sides, providing an important impetus and strategic guarantee for the healthy and stable development of China-India relations, according to an official press release issued here on Monday night on the Doval-Wang meeting.

As the two economies with the largest populations, China and India should not only view bilateral relations from a long-term perspective, but also promote cooperation between the two countries from a global perspective, Wang said.

India's pharma supply chain dependent on Chinese imports, says NITI Aayog

NEW DELHI, June 23 (PTI)

INDIA'S pharmaceutical supply chain remains heavily dependent (65 per cent) on Chinese imports for critical active pharmaceutical ingredient (APIs) and key starting materials, NITI Aayog said on Tuesday.

The Aayog, in its eighth edition of Trade Watch Quarterly, further said that rising environmental compliance requirements have significantly increased manufacturing and R&D costs in India.

"Supply Chain and Sustainability Challenges: India's pharmaceutical supply chain remains heavily dependent on Chinese imports (65 per cent) for critical active pharmaceutical ingredient (APIs), Key Starting Materials (KSMs), and intermediates, particularly fermentation-based products," it said. The report pointed out that weak innovation and a commercialisation ecosystem have created uncertainty for innovators and long-term investments.

It pitched for promoting diversification into high-value pharmaceutical segments.

The report also called for enhancing regulatory transparency and stronger industry-academia technology transfer in life-sciences clusters to accelerate patent commercialisation, research collaboration, and startup incubation. Releasing the report, NITI Aayog vice Chairman Ashok Kumar Lahiri said India is considered the pharmacy of the world.

"NITI Aayog has found out that while we are doing all right in terms of volume in pharmaceutical sector, we need to move up the value chain," Lahiri said.

He said India has some credibility in the international market, and he does not see any reason why Indian pharmaceutical companies, if they come up with good quality, modestly priced branded products, should not command a high international market.

India is a major supplier of affordable generic drugs (in volume), meeting approximately 50 per cent of Africa's, 40 per cent of the USA's, and 25 per cent of the UK's generic medicine requirements. The global drugs and pharmaceuticals market demand stood at USD 1.3 trillion in 2025.

Opening of Strait of Hormuz welcome move: NSA Doval at BRICS conclave

NEW DELHI, June 23 (PTI)

THE opening of the Strait of Hormuz is a very welcome move for global energy security, National Security Adviser Ajit

Doval said on Tuesday, welcoming his counterparts from BRICS nations at a key conclave here.

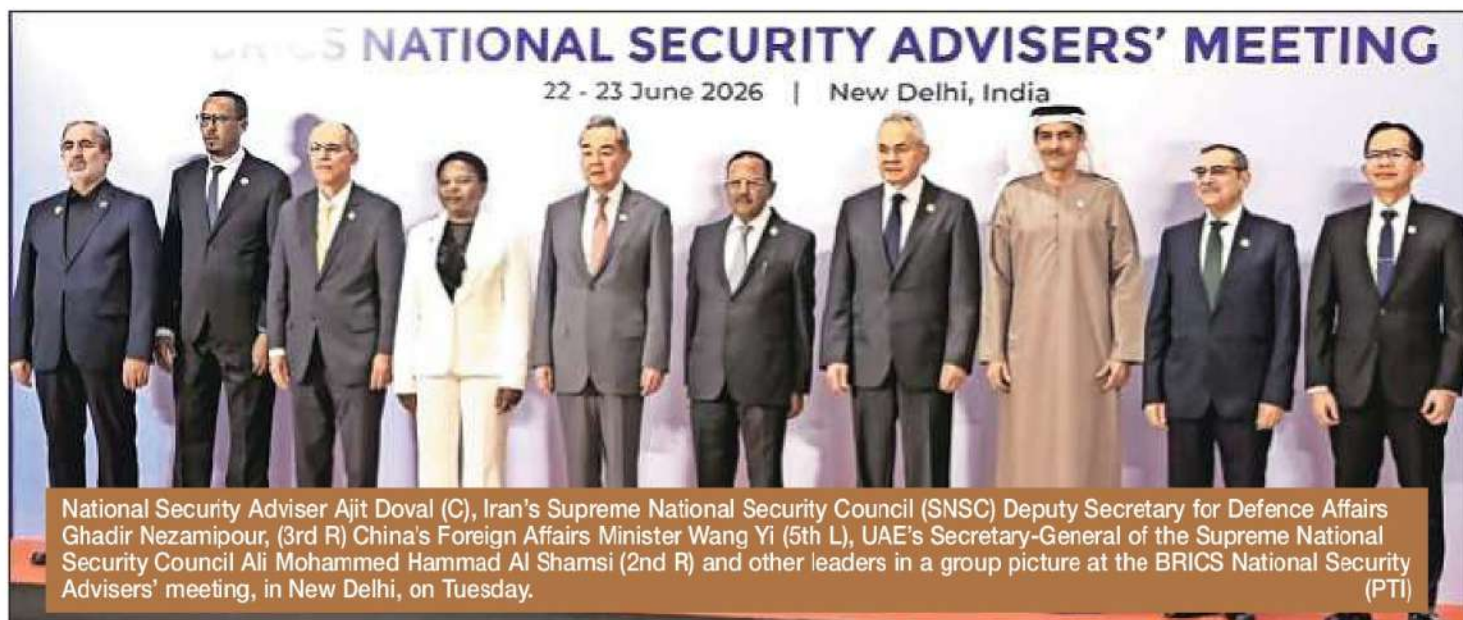
In his televised opening remarks at the BRICS NSAs meeting, Doval, touching upon impact

of geopolitical uncertainties and economic strains", underlined the need for the grouping to play a significant role in addressing the challenges.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang

Yi, Russian NSA Sergei Shoigu, Iranian security official Ghadir Nezamipour and other top BRICS security officials are attending the meeting chaired by Doval.

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China supports India in fulfilling its responsibilities as BRICS Chair: Wang

NEW DELHI, June 23 (ANI)

CHINESE Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral ties, calling for greater cooperation between the two Asian neighbours and leading economies of the Global South.

According to a post on X by Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong, Wang Yi said that "as the two economies with the largest populations, China and India should not only view bilateral

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Iran accuses UAE of direct role in military aggression during conflict

NEW DELHI, June 23 (ANI)

TENSIONS between Iran and the United Arab Emirates reached a boiling point during the 16th Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisers in New Delhi on Tuesday as Iranian officials formally accused the UAE of direct involvement in military strikes against the Islamic Republic during the operation by the US and Israel.

In a post on X, the Iranian Embassy in India stated that Ghadir Nezamipour, Deputy Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, launched a scathing rebuttal against the Emirati delegation during the high-level security forum.

US, Iran in dispute over whether Tehran has agreed to nuclear inspections

ISLAMABAD, June 23 (AP)

THE US and Iran were in dispute Tuesday over whether Tehran had agreed to allow UN inspections of its nuclear sites. As officials negotiated over how to permanently end the war in Iran, a separate plan emerged to break the shipping bottleneck through the Strait of Hormuz.

The disagreement over nuclear inspections came as Iran's President met with Pakistani mediators and technical teams from the US and Iran continued talks in Switzerland.

A United Nations agency said on Tuesday that a plan was underway to move stranded ships and their thousands of crew members through the strait - a vital passage for global energy supplies that Iran had blocked after the US and Israel launched the war on February 28.

Earlier in the day, a spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, Esmail Qahbani, told reporters in Tehran that UN inspectors were not scheduled to examine nuclear sites bombed by the US last year, rejecting comments made a day before by US Vice President JD Vance.

President Donald Trump told reporters on Tuesday that if Iran had not agreed to inspections, he would cut off talks with Tehran immediately. But he added there was no rush for those inspections to begin.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has not responded to requests for comment over its possible role. It has been in and out of Iran since Israel's 12-day war in 2025, but has not been granted access to bombed enrichment sites targeted by the US.

Iran maintains that its nuclear

programme is for peaceful purposes, though it has highly enriched uranium that could be used to build atomic bombs, should it choose to do so, the IAEA has said.

The plan to evacuate 11,000 crew members stranded on ships is being done in cooperation with Iran, Oman, all other coastal states in the region, the United States and the maritime industry, according to the secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization, Arsenio Dominguez.

"We have secured the necessary safety guarantees and have thoroughly verified the conditions for safe navigation to support these operations," he said in a statement.

The organisation said moving the ships will be done gradually to avoid any risk of collision.

A shipping insurance execu-

tive cheered the development. "That can only be good news for all concerned," said Marcus Baker, global head of marine, cargo and logistics for Marsh in London.

But the uneasy ceasefire already has been tested by Iran saying it closed the strait again over fighting between Israel and the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah in Lebanon. Violence again broke out in Lebanon Tuesday.

The US has said that negotiators have discussed 'mechanisms' to ensure that the strait remains open. Ship traffic is increasing but questions remain about who controls the passageway.

Data and analytics company Kpler confirmed 39 ships crossed through the strait Monday, after about 92 crossings between Friday and Sunday.

US to host Israel-Lebanon peace talks for three days this week

WASHINGTON, June 23 (IANS)

THE United States this week is hosting Israeli and Lebanese officials in Washington for a new round of talks aimed at consolidating the ceasefire and advancing what American officials described as a broader effort to secure lasting peace and security between the two countries.

The discussions are being led on the US side by State Department Counsellor Dan Holler and Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs Dan Zimmerman, the State Department said.

"Counselor Holler is kicking off talks along with ASW Zimmerman, we will begin with

a joint military and political session, then military session, then political closing round," a State Department official said.

The official said the format would include an opening joint military-political session, followed by a dedicated military meeting and a concluding political round. "Our shared goal is to end the cycle of violence for good," the official said.

Iran's missile programme was never part of US-Iran talks: Pak PM

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday clarified that the memorandum of under-

standing (MoU) signed between the US and Iran does not contain any provision related to Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

Sharif made these remarks following delegation-level talks during a joint press conference with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who was in Pakistan for a one-day state visit.

Responding to a question about Iran's nuclear and missile technology, Sharif stated that he would say "without fear of contradiction that Iran's ballistic missile program was not a subject of discussion between the US and Iran...It was not on the table."

"It is not possible that others have missiles and Iran does not have them," he said.

President Murmu confers Padma awards on eminent personalities

NEW DELHI, June 23 (PTI)

TENNIS legend Vijay Amritraj, actor Mammooty and playback singer Alka Yagnik were among 65 eminent personalities conferred with the coveted Padma awards by President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday.

In the second civil investiture ceremony at the Gantantra Mandap of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president presented Padma Vibhushan to former Supreme Court judge KT Thomas for public affairs and eminent Malayalam journalist P Narayanan for contribution in literature and education.

Alka Yagnik, Mammooty, American oncologist P. Narayanan, tennis player Vijay Amritraj, industrialist SKM Maelanandhan and social worker and educationist Vellappally Natesan received Padma Bhushan from the president during the ceremony.



President Droupadi Murmu confers the Padma Bhushan to tennis player Vijay Amritraj, veteran actor Mammooty and singer Alka Yagnik, Padma Shri to former Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma and actor R Madhavan during the second civil investiture ceremony, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. (PTI)

Rupi Soren, wife of JMM founder Shibu Soren, received the Padma Bhushan on behalf of the late leader.

On Republic Day eve, the government had announced 131 Padma awards for 2026, including five Padma Vibhushan awards.

The president had conferred 65 Padma Awards -- two Padma

Vibhushan, six Padma Bhushan and 57 Padma Shri in the first civil investiture ceremony held on May 25.

The Padma Awards -- one of the highest civilian awards of

the country, are conferred in three categories -- Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.

The awards are given in various disciplines of activities --

art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.

Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of high order and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field.

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