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Headlines:

- **Pakistan Rejects Unilateral and Arbitrary US Designation for Religious Freedom Violations**
- **Kashmir Internet Shutdown Takes Toll on Economy**
- **China Will Rewrite the Bible and Quran to Reflect Socialist Values**

Details:

Pakistan Rejects Unilateral and Arbitrary US Designation for Religious Freedom Violations

Pakistan on Tuesday rejected its listing by the United States as a violator of religious freedoms, saying the "unilateral and arbitrary designation" is not only detached from the ground realities of Pakistan but also raises questions about the credibility and transparency of the entire exercise. The Foreign Office in a strongly worded statement also questioned the "conspicuous omission" of India from the list, saying it reflected the "subjectivity and bias" of the US State Department's designations. The US had last week retained Pakistan among the countries that tolerate religious discrimination. The determination, made on December 18, includes Myanmar, China, Erit-r--ea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkm-enistan among the states that have been re-designated as "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)". The State Department makes these designations under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and countries on the CPC list are classified as "having engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing, [and] egregious violations of religious freedom". Countries in this category can face further actions, including economic sanctions, by Washington. The FO spokesperson said Pakistan's designation is reflective of "selective targeting of countries, and thus unlikely to be helpful to the professed cause of advancing religious freedom". "Pakistan is a multi-religious and pluralistic country where people of all faiths enjoy religious freedom under constitutional protections," the press release said, adding that all branches of the government — the executive, legislature and the judiciary — have made concerted efforts to ensure that all citizens of Pakistan can practice their religion freely. According to the FO, Pakistan has also engaged with the international community, including the US, to develop a better understanding of religious freedom issues and earlier this year, Senator Samuel Brownback, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, was welcomed in Pakistan for dialogue to advance the mutual objectives of religious freedom globally. "It is regrettable that this constructive engagement has been overlooked," the statement said. It added that the subjectivity and bias of the exercise are further illustrated by the omission of India, "the biggest violator of religious freedom". [Source: The Dawn]

Despite America's bias standards, Pakistan continues to serve American interests in the region. It is this blind servitude to Washington that has ruined Pakistan.

Kashmir Internet Shutdown Takes Toll on Economy

The internet shutdown in India's Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir, which shows no signs of abating and has been the longest lockdown in a democracy, is taking a toll on the local economy and has led to the loss of thousands of jobs, according to rights groups and analysts. Access Now, a global digital rights group that has been monitoring the situation in Kashmir, told VOA the "loss of connectivity in the valley" because of the shutdown has been "devastating to the local economy." "India's internet shutdown in Kashmir is the longest ever in a democracy," Raman Jit Singh Chima, Access Now's senior international counsel and Asia Pacific policy director, told VOA. "The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce has gone on record to speak of the immense economic cost that the internet shutdown has caused to the region, undermining the very economic goals that the Union Government promised it would

drive through integrating the area into the wider Indian Union," Chima added. The lockdown has been in place since August, when New Delhi revoked Kashmir's semiautonomous status and imposed a curfew on the region, including shutting down the internet. The government defended its decision, saying it was a temporary measure to prevent possible terrorist attacks. In a televised address to the nation in August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "The Kashmir decision will bring positive changes in the lives of the common man. It would mean the protection of Indian laws, industrialization, a boost in tourism and, therefore, more employment opportunities." However, opposition parties in the country argue the opposite is happening. India's parliament recently approved legislation that allows Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities who are living in India illegally to become citizens. The applicants must prove they were persecuted because of their religious beliefs in neighboring Bangladesh, Pakistan or Afghanistan. However, the law does not apply to Muslims, which critics say is discriminatory. Sheikh Ashiq, the president of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told VOA that there has been a rapid rise in unemployment and a significant drop in Kashmir's cottage industry. "Our handicraft sector, that is solely based on the internet, is at a standstill. As a result, 50,000 artisans are jobless," Ashiq said, adding that the export of its heritage industry handicrafts had declined by 62%. Experts say the action against Kashmir has led to losses in tourism, health care, education and in the communications industries. The state economy has lost more $1.5 billion due to [the] lockdown. Several companies, whose operations were internet-dependent, have been closed. [Source: Voice of America].

India takes pride in its democratic credentials but spares no effort in denying the same very rights to its Muslim citizens. Democracies around the world remain muted on the treatment of the people of Kashmir, and this sends a strong message that democracy and freedom is not for Muslims. It is a slogan to invade Muslim lands and enslave the populations to foreign masters.

China Will Rewrite the Bible and Quran to Reflect Socialist Values

China will rewrite the Bible and Quran to 'reflect socialist values' amid crackdown on the country's religious groups, a report has revealed.   New editions must not contain any content that goes against the beliefs of the Communist Party, according to a top party official. Paragraphs deemed wrong by the censors will be amended or re-translated. Though the Bible and Quran were not mentioned specifically, the party called for a 'comprehensive evaluation of the existing religious classics aiming at contents which do not conform to the progress of the times'. The order was given in November during a meeting held by the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which oversees the ethnic and religious matters in China. A group of 16 experts, believers and representatives of different religions from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China attended the conference in last month, according to Xinhua News Agency. The meeting was supervised by Wang Yang, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Mr Wang stressed that religious authorities must follow President Xi's instructions and interpret the ideologies of different religions in accordance with 'the core values of Socialism' and 'the requirements of the era', French newspaper Le Figaro reported. He urged the officials to build 'a religious system with Chinese characteristics'. The officials agreed with Mr Wang's directives, adding that the mission 'is the choice of history'. They also claimed that by 're-evaluating' religious books, they would prevent 'extreme thoughts' and 'heretical ideas' from eroding the country. [Source: The Daily Mail]

For some years now, China has been desperately trying to brainwash its Muslim population in Xinjiang. No doubt the current efforts to reinterpret the Quran will also fail.

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