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CPEC LOAN STRAINS CHINA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Disagreements have arisen between China and Pakistan over financing for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Main Line 1 (ML-1) railway project and phase II special economic zones (SEZ). Pakistan is seeking a \$6.1 billion concessionary loan from China for the \$6.8 billion ML-1, the largest CPEC project. Beijing, however, has yet to respond to Islamabad's proposal. "China is reluctant to lend money for ML-1 because Pakistan has already sought debt relief to meet G-20 lending conditions and it is not in a position to give sovereign guarantees," notes Nasir Jamal, a journalist in Lahore. Tensions over SEZs are also mounting; China had agreed to build the zones between 2020 and 2025, so Chinese companies can begin producing goods and exporting from Pakistan. Important questions on tax exemptions and labor requirements at the SEZ have yet to be finalized, however. (*New Straits Times*, January 19, 2021)

U.S. SAYS CHINA'S REPRESSION OF UIGHURS IS "GENOCIDE"

On the Trump Administration's final day, the State Department determined that China is committing genocide and crimes against humanity through its wide-scale repression of Uighurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. The decision was the culmination of extensive discussions about how to punish human rights abuses being perpetrated by the PRC, including mass internments and forced sterilizations. Subsequently, at his Senate confirmation hearing, Antony Blinken, President Biden's choice to succeed Pompeo as Secretary of State, won bipartisan praise for agreeing with that determination, adding that he had "no doubt" China posed the greatest challenge to the U.S. of any nation. According to international convention, genocide is the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the "so-called determination by Pompeo is nothing but paper." (*New York Times*, January 19, 2021)

CHINA SANCTIONS 27 FORMER U.S. OFFICIALS

As President Biden was being sworn in, China announced sanctions against outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and 27 other top former Trump administration officials. China's foreign ministry said Pompeo et al. had "planned, promoted and executed" actions that interfered in China's internal affairs. The ex-officials and their families are banned from entering China, and companies associated with them are restricted from doing business in the country. "Imposing these sanctions on Inauguration Day is seemingly an attempt to play to partisan divides. Americans of both parties should criticize this unproductive and cynical move. President Biden looks forward to working with leaders in both parties to position America to out-compete China," said a White House spokesperson. (Reuters, January 20, 2021)

TWITTER LOCKS CHINA'S EMBASSY ACCOUNT FOR "DEHUMANIZING" UIGHURS

Twitter has temporarily locked the account of China's embassy to the U.S. for a tweet defending its mistreatment of Uighurs. The post read: "In the process of eradicating extremism, the minds of Uighur women in Xinjiang were emancipated and gender equality and reproductive health were promoted, making them no longer baby-making machines." A Twitter spokesperson said that the tweet violated the company's content policy, which prohibits "the dehumanization of a group of people based on their religion, caste, age, disability, serious disease, national origin, race, or ethnicity." Twitter said the account will remain locked until the embassy deletes it. (CNN, January 21, 2021)

WITH COVID CASES MOUNTING, CHINA TO TEST ALL LUNAR NEW YEAR TRAVELERS

China will impose strict COVID-19 testing requirements on everyone returning home for the Lunar New Year holiday. The National Health Commission posted a notice online said anyone returning to rural areas from other provinces over the holiday would need to produce a negative coronavirus test. Some groups, including those that work with cold chain (temperature controlled supply chain) products or quarantine facility workers, will need to produce a test even if they remained within the same province, it said. Most of China's 280 million rural migrant workers usually travel home to their villages to see family during the period. (*Malay Mail*, January 21, 2021)