

Headlines:

- **World's Rich Deferred on Poor Country Debt Relief Extension**
- **US Orders Closure of China's Embassy in Houston**
- **Assad's Baath Party Wins Majority in Parliamentary Polls**

Details:

World's Rich Deferred on Poor Country Debt Relief Extension

G-20 finance ministers and central bank governors have put off a decision on extending the Debt Service Suspension Initiative for 73 poor countries beyond 2020 until their meeting in October 2020. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, 42 countries have requested a deferral of \$5.3 billion in repayments owed to the Paris Club's 22 members, but as of end-June only \$1.3 billion owed by 18 countries was approved. The G-20 expects a report on the liquidity needs of the poorest countries prior to its October ministerial meeting. Private sector creditors have thus far refused to participate, and China's full participation remains questionable, even though it is a G-20 country. Oxfam International and other nongovernmental organizations said last week that the current initiative is inadequate, especially without private sector participation, since it still requires eligible countries to pay nearly \$34 billion in 2020.

US Orders Closure of China's Embassy in Houston

The US abruptly ordered the closure of the Chinese Consulate in Houston citing "massive illegal spying and influence operations," and gave the Chinese 72 hours to vacate the premises. This comes less than a day after the Department of Justice unsealed an indictment accusing a pair of government-affiliated hackers of trying to steal COVID-19 research from US companies. The Chinese reportedly burned so many documents before leaving that the Houston Fire Department was called to the scene. The US-China relationship is reaching a critical point and even though all powers run espionage operations out of their embassies and consulates, this action by the US will lead to a complete breakdown in diplomatic channels.

Assad's Baath Party Wins Majority in Parliamentary Polls

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's party and its allies have won the majority of seats in the war-torn country's parliamentary election, denounced as "theatrical" by the exiled opposition. The so-called "National Unity" list won 177 seats in the 250-member parliament. The turnout was 33%, compared to 57 percent four years ago. Millions of people displaced by Syria's long-running war were not eligible to cast ballots in the poll, which took place amid deepening economic woes. "Simply put, these are illegitimate elections. The regime chose the candidates, even the independent ones, and they elected them," Yahya al-Aridi, a member of the opposition committee at UN peace talks in Geneva, was quoted as saying by the dpa news agency. "The majority of Syrians believe the election is only a process controlled by the regime to represent itself as a legitimate authority in Syria," Zaki Mehchy, a senior consulting fellow at Chatham House and co-founder of the Syrian Centre for Policy Research, told Al Jazeera ahead of the vote. "People know that the majority of MPs are nominated by the Baath party and all of them need to have security approval based on loyalty and not qualifications," he said.