

A ‘serious’ attack against rule of law

Says ICC as US slaps sanctions on its top prosecutor; EU ‘not happy’, pledges support to war crimes court

AGENCIES

The European Union yesterday said it will defend the International Criminal Court against attempts to undermine it after Washington slapped sanctions on the Hague-based tribunal’s top prosecutor -- a move that The Hague-based tribunal called a “serious” attack against the rule of law.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday announced sanctions against ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda and another senior court official, Phakiso Mochochoko, over a war crimes probe into US military personnel in Afghanistan.

Washington has long rejected the ICC’s jurisdiction over US citizens, but the court’s investigation into allegations of atrocities in Afghanistan has seen President Donald Trump’s administration turn low-level opposition into a concerted campaign against the institution.

“The International Criminal Court is facing persistent external challenges and the European Union stands firm against all attempts to undermine the international system of criminal justice by hindering the work of its core institutions,” Peter Stano, spokesman for EU diplomatic chief Josep



Borrell, told reporters.

US earlier imposed visa bans on Bensouda and others but failed to head off the court’s war crimes probe into US military personnel in Afghanistan.

The ICC quickly fired back.

“These coercive acts, directed at an international judicial institution and its civil servants, are unprecedented and constitute serious attacks against the court, the Rome Statute system of international criminal justice, and the rule of law more generally,” it said in a statement.

The sanctions freeze the US assets of the two officials, and bar any US individuals from doing business with them.

The United States -- like Russia, China, Israel, Syria and a number of other countries -- is not a member of the ICC, and its opposition to the court is longstanding.

The United States argues that it has its own procedures in place to investigate accusations against troops.

Also underpinning Washington’s enmity is the ICC’s investigation into alleged war crimes by US ally Israel against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok said his country was disappointed over the US move.



A Filipino crew member of Gulf Livestock 1 is being rescued by a Japan Coast Guard boat at the East China Sea, to the west of Amami Oshima island in southwestern Japan, on Wednesday. Japanese coast guard rescuers were searching yesterday for the remaining 42 crew of the ship believed to have sunk by Typhoon Maysak, after a lone survivor was found bobbing in a lifejacket. The Gulf Livestock 1, which was carrying a cargo of nearly 6,000 cows, issued a distress call in the early hours of Wednesday from a position 185 kilometres west of Japan’s Amami Oshima island. The typhoon drenched both Koreas yesterday, killing at least one person in the South and inundating streets across a port in the North as it churned its way up the peninsula.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWSIN brief

FB bans BJP MP for policy violation

REUTERS, New Delhi

Facebook Inc has banned a member of India’s ruling party for violating its policies covering violence and hate, as Mark Zuckerberg’s company finds itself caught in a political debate over alleged bias in its handling of content in India. The company said it had banned politician Raja Singh from Facebook and Instagram under its “dangerous individuals and organizations” policy. The Wall Street Journal reported the move earlier.

Last Taliban prisoners freed except ‘few’

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan government yesterday said they have released the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners agreed in an exchange, except for “a few” opposed by foreign nations, and expected peace negotiations to start soon. A drawn-out prisoner swap including the contentious release of hundreds of hardened militants has delayed the start of planned negotiations between the two warring sides, scheduled to take place in Doha.

Pakistan eyes a billion from hemp production

AFP, ISLAMABAD

Cash strapped Pakistan has unveiled plans to allow the industrial production of hemp, spurring hopes farmers and businesses in the conservative Islamic country will be able to tap into the lucrative global cannabis market. “This hemp market could provide Pakistan with some \$1 billion in the next three years,” science and technology minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER TENSIONS

Beijing fumes over more apps ban

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday decried a fresh ban by India on scores of Chinese apps -- including the hit game PUBG -- as a bitter border showdown seeped out into the tech sphere.

Internet giant Tencent is among the Chinese makers of 118 more apps be targeted in the latest Indian ban, which follows a rumbling territorial dispute along a disputed Himalayan frontier. At least 20 Indian soldiers were killed in hand-to-hand combat during a battle in June.

India has hit back by pulling scores of Chinese apps from its massive domestic market, including video-sharing platform TikTok.

The latest salvo announced on Wednesday whipped in blockbuster shoot-em-up game PUBG, and has angered Chinese authorities and dismayed Indian gamers.

“India has abused the concept of national security and adopted discriminatory restrictive measures against Chinese companies,” Chinese commerce ministry spokesman Gao Feng told an online press briefing on Thursday.

China firmly opposes the measure, he said, urging India to “correct its wrong practices”.

Beijing also implied India had imposed the ban in the face of pressure from the United States, with foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying yesterday warning against “short-sighted” participation in US restrictions against Chinese technology.

Indian authorities say they are moving against the proliferation of Chinese tech because it promotes activities “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order”.



The New Diamond, a very large crude carrier (VLCC) chartered by Indian Oil Corp (IOC), that was carrying the equivalent of about 2 million barrels of oil, is seen after a fire broke out off east coast of Sri Lanka, Yesterday.

INTERNATIONAL

‘POISONING’ OF PUTIN CRITIC WITH NOVICHOK

Russia defiant amid outrage

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday rejected claims that Moscow was behind the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, as calls mounted for international action after Germany said he had been dosed with Novichok.

Western leaders are demanding answers from Moscow after Berlin said Wednesday there was “unequivocal evidence” that the 44-year-old Kremlin critic had been afflicted by the infamous nerve agent.

Navalny, one of President Vladimir Putin’s fiercest critics, fell ill on a flight last month and was treated in a Siberian hospital before being evacuated to Berlin. He is still in the intensive care unit and remains on a ventilator.

Germany’s claim that he was exposed to Novichok -- the same substance used against Russian ex-double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the English town of Salisbury two years ago -- prompted widespread condemnation and demands for an investigation.

Russia denies there is any evidence that Navalny was poisoned and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Berlin had not provided Moscow with proof.

“There is no reason to accuse the Russian state,”



Peskov said, rejecting talk of economic sanctions and urging the West not to “rush to judgement”.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the Novichok findings raised “some very serious questions that only Russia can and must answer”, while the United States, Britain, France, the EU and Nato all expressed shock.

Already suffering from wide-ranging Western sanctions imposed over its 2014 annexation of Crimea, as well as the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the drop in oil prices, Moscow will be anxious to avoid any further pressure on its economy.

A new crisis in relations with the West could also threaten Russia’s Nord Stream 2 project, a 10 billion-euro (\$11 billion) pipeline near completion beneath the Baltic Sea which is set to double Russian natural gas shipments to Germany.

Germany has been battling US pressure to scrap the project, but the country’s biggest newspaper Bild yesterday called for the project to be suspended, saying that “if the (German) government does not stop the construction of Nord Stream 2, we will soon be financing Putin’s Novichok attacks”.

Peskov rejected such calls as “emotional statements,” saying the project “is in the interests of Russia, Germany and the entire European continent.”

Youth sue 33 countries over climate inaction

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

Six Portuguese children and young adults, who have faced deadly wildfires and heatwaves, yesterday filed a lawsuit against 33 countries with the European Court of Human Rights, claiming government inaction on climate change jeopardises their future.

The applicants, aged between eight and 21, want the governments to ramp up efforts to curb planet-heating emissions, saying failure to do so threatened their lives and wellbeing.

Thousands of climate lawsuits have been filed against governments and companies worldwide in the past few years, but this case is the first to be brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), lawyers for the applicants said. The action targets the 33 largest greenhouse gas emitters among the 47 member states of the Strasbourg-based ECHR, including all EU countries, Britain, Switzerland, Norway, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, they said.

According to research consortium Climate Action Tracker, those 33 countries are not doing enough to meet an internationally agreed goal of limiting global warming to well below 2C (3.6°F) above pre-industrial times.

Microsoft unveils ‘deepfake’ detector ahead of US vote

Microsoft has unveiled software that can help spot “deepfake” photos or videos, adding to the list of programs designed to fight the hard-to-detect images ahead of the US presidential election. The Video Authenticator software analyzes an image or each frame of a video, looking for evidence of manipulation that could even be invisible to the naked eye. Deepfakes are photos, videos or audio clips altered using artificial intelligence to appear authentic and are already targeted by initiatives on Facebook and Twitter. “They could appear to make people say things they didn’t or to be places they weren’t,” said a company blog post on Tuesday. Microsoft said it has partnered with the AI Foundation in San Francisco to make the video authentication tool available to political campaigns, news outlets and others involved in the democratic process.

Arctic wildfires have caused record CO2 emissions: EU

This year’s Arctic Circle wildfires, still ablaze, have already surpassed the record set in 2019 for CO2 emissions, adding to the carbon pollution humanity needs to curtail, the European Union’s Earth observation programme said yesterday. Uncontrolled forest fires across one of the planet’s coldest regions has sent a quarter of a billion tonnes of CO2 spiralling into the atmosphere since January this year, topping by more than a third the total for 2019, according to satellite data. Almost all of the fires are in Russia, the EU’s Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts jointly reported.

Modi’s Twitter account hacked



The Twitter account of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been hacked, the social media giant confirmed yesterday. Tweets were sent from the prime minister’s feed asking for charitable donations using a cryptocurrency, but have since been taken down. “We are actively investigating the situation,” a spokesman for Twitter said. In July former US president Barack Obama and tech bosses Bill Gates and Elon Musk were among dozens of high-profile figures to have their Twitter accounts breached in a massive hack by scammers trying to dupe people into sending bitcoin. Twitter said it had not found any link between the Modi hack and the July breach.

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP

IN REMEMBRANCE

Group Captain (Retd) Taher Quddus
7 September 1936 - 4 September 2013

In loving memory of our beloved Managing Director sadly missed along life's way, quietly remembered everyday, no longer in our lives to share, but in our hearts, you're always there you shall never fade away

Fondly remembered by:
The Securex Family

KSA opens airspace for UAE-Israel flights

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has agreed to permit UAE flights to “all countries” to overfly the kingdom, as Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu signalled more direct flights linking the UAE with the Jewish state.

The announcement comes after the first direct commercial flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi on Monday, which passed through Saudi airspace, to mark the normalisation of Israel-UAE ties.

Riyadh’s decision marks another concrete sign of Saudi Arabia’s cooperation with Israel even after it refused publicly to follow the UAE in establishing diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan insisted that Wednesday’s decision does not change the kingdom’s “firm and established” position towards the Palestinian issue.

But the kingdom has cultivated clandestine relations with Israel in recent years based on a shared animosity towards Iran.

This is not the first time the kingdom has opened its airspace for Israel-bound flights. In March 2018, Air India launched the first scheduled service to Israel that was allowed to cross Saudi airspace.

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