

# G7 urges greater role for women in peace process

AFP, Dinar

Foreign ministers from the world's seven most developed nations on Saturday urged a greater role for women in solving conflicts, saying that peace settlements with female involvement were more likely to endure.

The Group of Seven (G7) ministers, at their meeting in the northern French resort of Dinar to prepare a summit meeting under French presidency in August, also called on greater mobilisation worldwide to "prevent sexual and gender-based violence in conflict".

"Women rarely sit at the negotiating table," the final statement of the meeting said, adding that only rarely do peace agreements include provisions that protect women's human rights.

"At the same time, we know that when women are meaningfully included and play an influential role in peace processes, peace agreements are more likely to last," it said.

According to the UN Women's agency, between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only two percent of mediators, eight percent of negotiators, and five percent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes.

France has placed gender inequality at the heart of its presidency of the G7, although a plan to create a new mechanism to warn about sexual violence being used as a weapon during war was not included in a final joint statement.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that the countries had agreed a "roadmap" to adopt the mechanism.

The ministers vowed to enhance coordination to support "women's participation in peace processes including in their roles as negotiators, mediators and peacebuilders."

A final statement said the international community must be "mobilised to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in conflict" but also better help survivors and assist children born as a result of sexual violence in conflict.



Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido, who many nations have recognised as the country's rightful interim ruler, attends a rally against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela on Saturday. Guaido called for a huge nationwide turnout on Wednesday, and urged his followers to redouble their efforts to maintain pressure in the streets.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Libya crisis escalates

Haftar forces conduct air strike on Tripoli as UN calls for truce

REUTERS, Tripoli/benghazi

Eastern Libyan forces carried out an air strike on the southern part of Tripoli yesterday, escalating an operation to take the capital despite calls for a truce from the United Nations.

The Libyan National Army (LNA) force of Khalifa Haftar, which backs a parallel administration in the east, last week launched an advance on Tripoli in the west, the home to the internationally recognised government.

The offensive intensifies a power struggle that has fractured the oil and gas producer since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

The LNA claims to have reached the southern outskirts and taken its former international airport though the Tripoli military officials deny this.

A war plane carried out an air strike in the same area, a resident and eastern military source said. No more details were immediately available.

The UN mission to Libya (UNSMIL) yesterday called for a truce for two hours in southern Tripoli to evacuate civilians and wounded, it said in a statement without giving details. At least 21 people have been killed since the offensive.

In another sign of the situation worsening on the ground, a contingent of US forces supporting the US Africa Command evacuated Libya for security reasons, a US statement said. It gave no details.

Forces allied to the Tripoli government meanwhile announced its own operation called "Volcano of Anger" to defend the capital, a spokesman said, without giving details.

Powerful armed groups from the western city of Misrata and fighters from Zentan and Zawiyah -- all battle-hardened militiamen who took part in the 2011 uprising -- have joined the battle.

The offensive has taken the UN by surprise, undermining plan to find agreement on a road map for elections to resolve the protracted instability in Libya, transit point for refugees and migrants trekking across the Sahara with the objective of reaching Europe across the Mediterranean Sea to the north.

Haftar, 75, who casts himself as a foe of Islamist extremism but is viewed by opponents as a new dictator in the mould of Gaddafi, enjoys the backing of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, which see him as a bulwark against Islamists and have supported him militarily, according to UN reports.

US forces evacuate Libya for safety reasons

Forces allied to Tripoli govt announce counter offensive



# Force out US troops 'as soon as possible'

Khamenei urges Iraq

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called on Iraq to demand US troops leave "as soon as possible", warning that Washington is plotting to remove the Iraqi government.

The remarks came during a visit to Tehran on Saturday by Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, whose country is under pressure from the United States to distance itself from Iran.

"You should take actions to make sure the Americans withdraw their troops from Iraq as soon as possible because wherever they have had an enduring presence, forcing them out has become problematic," Khamenei told Abdel Mahdi.

"The current government and parliament in Iraq and the political figures are not what the US desires; they plot to remove them from the political scene of Iraq," he said, according to his official website.

Abdel Mahdi, on his first



official trip to Iran, also met Saturday with President Hassan Rouhani, who visited Iraq last month.

Baghdad is under pressure from Washington to limit ties with its neighbour, particularly after the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal last year and hit Tehran with sanctions.

Iran has close but complicated ties with Iraq, with significant influence among its Shia political groups.

The two countries fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988. But ties improved between the countries since the IS invasion in Iraq.

The call came after the Wall Street Journal reported that Washington was planning to designate the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organisation.

# CANCELLATION OF PROSECUTOR'S VISA BY US

## EU backs ICC

AFP, Brussels

The EU on Saturday declared its support for the International Criminal Court, voicing "serious concern" after the US revoked the chief prosecutor's visa over a possible investigation into American soldiers' actions in Afghanistan.

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's office confirmed Friday that Washington had revoked her visa for entry into the US -- a move that came after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced restrictions on ICC staff who probe US or allied personnel.

A spokesperson for the EU's diplomatic service said the bloc "fully supports the ICC and its independence" and said Brussels expects the US to comply with its "international obligations" towards the court.

"The European Union reiterates its serious concern about the US policy towards the ICC," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"The ICC plays a key role in the fight against impunity. The EU emphasises that protecting the neutrality and judicial independence of the ICC is paramount to its effectiveness and proper functioning."

Bensouda asked ICC judges in November 2017 for authorisation to open an investigation into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan by the Taliban. Afghan government forces and international forces including US troops.

The court has not yet decided whether to launch a full-blown probe.

The US has never joined the ICC and does not recognise its authority over American citizens, saying it poses a threat to national sovereignty. Washington also argues that it has its own robust procedures in place to deal with US troops who engage in misconduct.

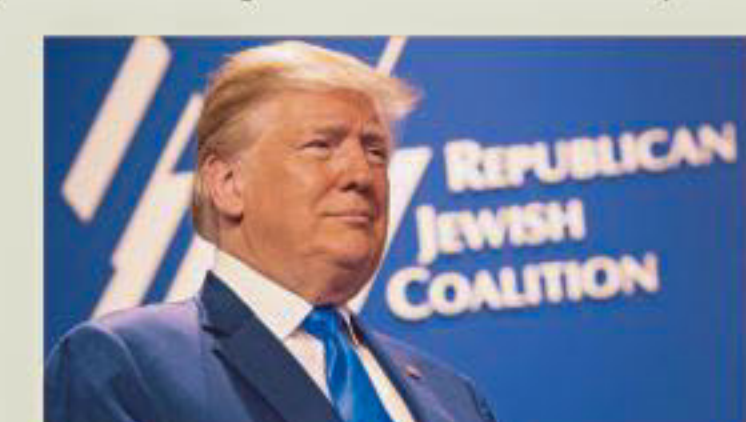


# Prince William spent 3 weeks with spies

Britain's Prince William has concluded a three-week attachment with the country's security and intelligence agencies MIS, M16 and GCHQ, his office said yesterday. William started his assignment at the Secret Intelligence Service, known as MI6, followed by a week at security service MIS, ending at GCHQ, which gathers communications from around the world to identify and disrupt threats to Britain.

# Nasheed wins landslide win in Maldives polls

The former Maldives president yesterday vowed sweeping reforms and an end to government corruption after leading his party to a record landslide victory just five months since returning from exile. Mohamed Nasheed, 51, made a dramatic return to the top of the national parliament, with his Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) securing 68 seats in the 87-member assembly. Nasheed was barred from running in the presidential election but his former deputy, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, emerged triumphant over strongman Abudulla Yameen last year.



# 'Give me a quickie'

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he made the controversial decision to recognize Israel's 1981 annexation of the Golan Heights after getting a quick history lesson during a conversation on a different subject. Speaking at the Republican Jewish Coalition gathering in Las Vegas, Trump said he made the snap decision during a discussion with his top Middle East peace advisers, including the US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, and son-in-law Jared Kushner. "I said, 'Follows, do me a favor. Give me a little history, quick. Want to go fast. I got a lot of things I'm working on: China, North Korea. Give me a quickie,'" Trump said to laughter from the Las Vegas crowd. "I went - 'BING!' - it was done," Trump said on Saturday, describing the swiftness of his decision. "We make fast decisions. And we make good decisions." Israel captured the Golan in the 1967 war and annexed it in 1981 in a move not recognized internationally. SOURCE: AFP, CNN

# Rwanda 'a family again'

Says president 25 years after genocide; nation begins 100 days of mourning

AFP, Kigali

President Paul Kagame yesterday said that Rwandans had become a family again, 25 years after more than 800,000 people were slaughtered in a genocide that shocked the world.

Kagame lit a remembrance flame at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, where more than 250,000 victims are believed to be buried, mainly from the minority Tutsi people, as the country began its annual 100 days of mourning that coincide with the length of the slaughter.

They are only some of those killed by the genocidal Hutu forces, members of the old army and militia forces called the "Interahamwe", that began their bloody campaign of death on April 7, 1994, the day after the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu.

Some were shot; most were beaten or hacked by machetes.

"In 1994, there was no hope, only darkness. Today, light radiates from this place... How did it happen? Rwanda became a family

once again," Kagame said. "The arms of our people, intertwined, constitute the pillars of our nation. We hold each other up. Our bodies and minds bear amputations and scars, but none of us is alone. Together, we have woven the tattered threads of our unity into a new tapestry," he said.

The killings lasted until Kagame, then 36, led the mainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) into Kigali on July 4, ending the slaughter and taking control of the devastated country.

Kagame, now 61 and who has been in power ever since, is leading the memorial to the dead.

In past years, ceremonies have triggered painful flashbacks for some in the audience, with crying, shaking, screaming and fainting amid otherwise quiet vigils.

For many survivors, forgiveness remains difficult when the bodies of their loved ones have not been found and many killers are still free.

A quarter of a century on, the east African nation has recovered economically, but the trauma still casts a dark shadow.



Rwanda's President Paul Kagame (L) and his wife Jeannette pay their respects in front of a wreath for the 25th Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Kigali, Rwanda yesterday. The 100 days of slaughter began on April 6, 1994, after President Juvenal Habyarimana and his counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi - both Hutus - were killed when their plane was shot down over the Rwandan capital. PHOTO: AFP

# Brexit compromise?

Time ticking down for Britain to come to an agreement

REUTERS, London

Britain's government held out the possibility of compromise with the opposition Labour Party yesterday to try to win support in parliament for leaving the European Union with a deal, just days before the latest Brexit date.

Prime Minister Theresa May, weaker than ever after her Brexit deal was rejected by parliament three times, has been forced to turn to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn after giving up on winning over eurosceptics in her Conservative Party, whose opposition has hardened.

With Britain's departure now set for April 12, May's government is running out of time to get a deal through a divided parliament, and must come up with a new plan to secure another delay from EU leaders at a summit on Wednesday.

In a last-ditch bid to get her deal through parliament, May opened talks with Corbyn last week to try to strike a deal on Britain's future ties with the EU in exchange for his support for her divorce deal, the Withdrawal Agreement.

So far those talks have failed to yield any kind of accord, with Labour policy chiefs saying the government has yet to move from its "red lines", above all over a customs union,

which sets tariffs for goods imported into the EU.

May has opposed remaining in the EU's customs union saying it would mean that Britain could not secure free trade deals with other countries - a key plank to her Brexit strategy that saw her create a new government department for trade.

May, who has been verbally mauled by members of her own party for turning to Labour, herself warned Brexit-supporting lawmakers that "the longer this takes, the greater the risk of the UK never leaving at all".

"Specifically provided we are leaving the European Union then it is important that we compromise, that's what this is about and it is through gritted teeth," said Andrea Leadsom, the Brexit-supporting leader of the House of Commons (lower house of parliament).

"But nevertheless the most important thing is to actually leave the EU," she told the BBC's Andrew Marr show, adding that May's proposal for a customs arrangement after Brexit was not too far from Labour's desire for a customs union.

Germany's finance minister, Olaf Scholz, called on the two sides to find what he called "a sensible agreement to end the paralysis in British politics and to avoid a disorderly Brexit".

May's government suggests it's open to compromise

Opposition Labour still waiting for changes to 'red lines'



# US will never allow Saudi to be nuke power: Pompeo

CNN ONLINE

On the outskirts of Riyadh, a building site is quickly being transformed into the birthplace of Saudi Arabia's quest for nuclear power, a bid that has sparked concern in the US Congress and fury in Tehran.

New satellite imagery shows that construction on an experimental reactor is making "expeditious" progress -- just three months after the Kingdom announced plans to build it, according to former director for nuclear inspections at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Robert Kelley. He estimated that the reactor could be completed in "nine months to a year."

It has repeatedly pledged that the program is peaceful. But Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said last year that "without a doubt if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible."

Also raising concern among industry experts and some in Congress is the Saudi insistence that it should be allowed to produce its own nuclear fuel, rather than import it under strict conditions.

Skepticism in the US Congress over whether Saudi Arabia can be a trusted partner has grown since the gruesome murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last year.

Asked whether it was acceptable for Saudi Arabia to become a nuclear power, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was unequivocal in a TV interview on Friday.

"We will not permit that to happen. We will not permit that to happen anywhere in the world," Pompeo told CBS. "The President understands the threat of proliferation. We will never write a \$150 million check to the Saudis and hand them over the capacity to threaten Israel and the United States with nuclear weapons, never."