

Quotes of the day



“We did not go to Afghanistan to nation build. And it's the right and the responsibility of the Afghan people alone to decide their future.”

US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN



“There should be no space for carelessness or complacency. A single mistake would have far-reaching impacts.”

INDIAN PM MODI TO HIS NEW CABINET ON COVID-19 CRISIS

We 'control 85pc Afghan territory'

Claim Taliban, seize key border crossings; Biden says Kabul's fall to insurgents 'not inevitable'

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban yesterday claimed to be in control of 85 percent of Afghanistan after seizing key border crossings with Iran and Turkmenistan following a sweeping offensive launched as US troops pulled out of the war-torn nation.

Hours after President Joe Biden issued a staunch defence of the US withdrawal, the Taliban said its fighters had seized two vital border crossings in western Afghanistan -- completing an arc of territory from the Iranian border to the frontier with China.

In Moscow, a visiting delegation of Taliban officials said they controlled about 250 of Afghanistan's 398 districts -- a claim impossible to independently verify and disputed by the government.

Separately, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP their fighters had captured the border town of Islam Qala on the Iranian frontier and the Torghundi crossing with Turkmenistan.

Afghanistan's interior ministry spokesman Tareq Arian said efforts were under way to dislodge the insurgents from their positions.

Hours earlier, Biden said the US military mission would end on August 31 -- nearly 20 years after it began -- having "achieved" its goals.

But he admitted it was "highly



Members of Taliban political office attend a news conference in Moscow, Russia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

unlikely" Kabul would be able to control the entire country.

"The status quo is not an option," Biden said of staying in the country. "I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan."

With the Taliban having routed much of northern Afghanistan in recent weeks, the government holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must be largely reinforced and resupplied by air.

The air force was under severe strain even before the Taliban's lightning offensive overwhelmed the

government's northern and western positions, putting further pressure on the country's limited aircraft and pilots.

Biden said the Afghan people alone should determine their future, but he acknowledged the uncertainty about what that would look like.

Asked if a Taliban takeover was inevitable, the president said: "No, it is not."

But, he admitted, "the likelihood there is going to be one unified government in Afghanistan controlling the whole country is highly unlikely".

The Taliban, for their part, welcomed

Biden's statement.

Afghan commandos clashed with the insurgents this week in a provincial capital, with thousands of people fleeing Qala-i-Naw in northwest Badghis province.

Yesterday, the Afghan defence ministry said government forces had "full control" of the city.

President Ashraf Ghani said the government could handle the situation, but admitted difficulties lay ahead.

The Taliban have been emboldened by the troop withdrawal and -- with peace talks in Doha deadlocked -- appear to be pressing for a full military victory.

In Moscow, a Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman said the Taliban controlled about two-thirds of the Afghan-Tajik border as a delegation from the insurgents wound up a visit.

About "85 percent of Afghanistan's territory" was under the group's control, said Taliban delegate Shahabuddin Delawar, who added that the group was committed to preventing other jihadists from using Afghanistan as a base for their operations.

The Kabul government has repeatedly dismissed the Taliban's gains as having little strategic value, but the seizure of multiple border crossings along with mineral-rich areas will likely fill the group's coffers with several sources of new revenue.

NEWS IN brief

US sanctions 34 companies over China, Russia, Iran ties

The United States yesterday announced sanctions against 34 companies and other entities involved with China's military and policy towards the Uyghur Muslim minority, and for facilitating exports to Russia and Iran. Fourteen are based in China and involved in its policy towards the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the northwest Xinjiang region. Another five were involved with assisting China's military acquire lasers and other technology to modernize its military. Eight entities were sanctioned for exporting US technology to Iran, the Commerce Department said, while another seven were blacklisted for involvement with Russia's military.

Zika virus detected in India's Kerala state

Authorities in India's southern Kerala region have issued a statewide alert after a case of the Zika virus was confirmed, officials said yesterday. A further 13 suspected cases were being investigated, state health minister Veena George said. A 24-year-old pregnant woman was found to be infected with the mosquito-borne disease and was undergoing treatment at a hospital in Thiruvananthapuram city. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable and can transmit the infection to their newborns which can result in life-altering conditions such as Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare auto-immune disease. Zika is mostly spread through the bite of the Aedes mosquito but can also be sexually transmitted.

UK police officer pleads guilty to Everard's murder

A British police officer yesterday admitted murdering Sarah Everard, whose killing sparked anger, protests and soul-searching across the country about what the authorities and society could do to stop male violence against women. Wayne Couzens, 48, a serving London officer who guarded diplomatic premises, had previously admitted rape and kidnap. He abducted Everard, 33, into a hire car as she walked home from a friend's house in south London on March 3 and her body was later found in woodland around 80 km away in southeast England.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Weaponry, mobile phones, passports and other items are being shown to the media along with suspects in the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ASSASSINATION OF HAITI PRESIDENT

Colombian, US suspects blamed

AFP, Port-au-Prince

A 28-member hit squad made up of Americans and Colombians assassinated President Jovenel Moise, Haitian police said Thursday, adding that eight were still at large as the country lurched into political chaos.

One day after Moise was killed and his wife Martine wounded by gunmen in their Port-au-Prince home, the poorest country in the Americas has no president or working parliament and two men claiming to be in charge as prime minister.

Police paraded some of the suspects before the media Thursday, along with Colombian passports and weapons they had seized. The head of the Haiti's National Police, Leon Charles, vowed to track the other eight down.

"It was a team of 28 assailants, 26 of whom were Colombian, who carried

out the operation to assassinate the president," Charles said at the press conference in Port-au-Prince.

"We have arrested 15 Colombians and the two Americans of Haitian origin. Three Colombians have been killed while eight others are on the loose."

Previously authorities had said four of the suspects had been killed. Charles did not explain the discrepancy.

Taiwan confirmed late Thursday that 11 of the suspects were arrested on its embassy grounds, after security discovered a group of armed men had broken into the courtyard of the property that had been shuttered "for safety reasons" after Moise's murder.

The embassy gave permission to Haitian police to enter the grounds, said Joanne Ou, a spokeswoman for Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "The process went smoothly,"

Taiwan's embassy in Port-au-Prince said in a statement, describing Moise's assassination as "cruel and barbaric."

Colombia's defense minister Diego Molano said at least six members of the hit squad appeared to be Colombian ex-soldiers, and that he had ordered the army and police to help with the investigation.

In Port-au-Prince, shops, banks and gas stations were closed, as questions swirled over who killed the president and why -- and why his security detail had failed to protect him.

Authorities have not confirmed the identities of the two Americans of Haitian origin. Officials have said the killers spoke English and Spanish.

Haiti's ambassador to Washington, Bocchit Edmond, has said the killers were "professional" mercenaries disguised as US Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

G20 finance chiefs to back global tax deal

REUTERS, Venice

Finance ministers representing the G20 large economies back a deal setting a global floor for corporate tax rates and will push to resolve outstanding issues on it by October, the latest draft of a joint communique said.

The communique, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, urged any hold-out nations to join the deal. Two sources said the statement was expected to be released without changes at their meeting in the Italian city of Venice due to be wrapped up today.

"We call on (countries involved in the global talks) to swiftly address the remaining issues and finalise the design elements within the agreed framework together with a detailed plan for the implementation of the two pillars by our next meeting in October," the statement said.

"We invite all members (involved in the discussion) that have not yet joined the international agreement to do so."

The statement, if approved, represents political endorsement of an agreement this month among 131 countries, at talks hosted by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, on taxation of multinationals' profits and setting a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15%. The aim is to have G20 leaders give it final blessing at an October summit in Rome.

If all goes to plan, the new tax rules should be translated into binding legislation worldwide before the end of 2023. The meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bankers in Venice is their first face-to-face encounter since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Two soldiers among 10 killed in gunbattles

AGENCIES

Eight suspected rebels and two Indian soldiers have been killed in a series of counterinsurgency operations in Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said.

The deaths in five separate incidents starting on Wednesday came as violence in the Himalayan region has increased in recent weeks.

India's military said two soldiers and two rebels were killed on Thursday in a clash along the Line of Control (LoC), the highly militarised de facto frontier that divides Kashmir between nuclear-armed rivals Pakistan and India.

The fighting erupted after soldiers intercepted a group of armed men who crossed into the Indian-administered portion of Kashmir from the Pakistani side,

the military said.

Earlier, the Indian army said its soldiers killed a suspected fighter who was infiltrating into the Indian side of Kashmir on Wednesday.

Four suspected rebels were killed in two separate gunfights with Indian troops in southern Kashmir's Pulwama and Kulgam districts early on Thursday, the Indian military said.

Officials said 71 armed rebels were killed this year so far.

The surge in violence came after PM Narendra Modi last month held talks with 14 pro-India leaders from the region, the first political engagement from New Delhi after it scrapped the region's partial autonomy and divided the region into two territories in August 2019.

UNREST IN KASHMIR



JULY 10

1940 - The Battle of Britain began in WWII when at least 70 German bombers attacked docks in south Wales.

1991 - Boris Yeltsin was sworn in as the first elected president of Russia.

1995 - Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest after nearly six years in detention.

2017 - Iraq announces victory over Islamic State in Mosul.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Toilet that turns excrement into power and digital currency

REUTERS, Ulsan

Using a toilet can pay for your coffee or buy you bananas at a university in South Korea, where human waste is being used to help power a building.

Cho Jae-weon, an urban and environmental engineering professor at the Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (UNIST), has designed an eco-friendly toilet connected to a laboratory that uses excrement to produce biogas and manure.

The BeeVi toilet - a portmanteau of the words bee and vision - uses a vacuum pump to send faeces into an underground tank, reducing water use. There, microorganisms break down the waste to methane, which becomes a source of energy for the building, powering a gas stove, hot-water boiler and solid oxide fuel cell.

"If we think out of the box, faeces has precious value to make energy and manure. I have put this value into ecological circulation," Cho said.

An average person defecates about 500g a day, which can be converted to 50 litres of methane gas, the environmental engineer said. This gas can generate 0.5kWh of electricity or be used to drive a car for about 1.2km (0.75 miles).

Cho has devised a virtual currency called Ggool, which means honey in Korean. Each person using the eco-friendly toilet earns 10 Ggool a day.

Students can use the currency to buy goods on campus, from freshly brewed coffee to instant cup noodles, fruits and books. The students can pick up the products they want at a shop and scan a QR code to pay with Ggool.



DISPUTE OVER CONTROVERSIAL NILE DAM

Deal still possible: UN

AFP, United Nations

An agreement on Ethiopia's controversial Nile River dam is possible, the UN said Thursday, urging "trust, transparency and open engagement" as Egypt accused Addis Ababa of threatening its existence.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has drawn the ire of Egypt and Sudan since construction began in 2011, with both fearing for their water resources.

Ethiopia, which intends to continue the second phase of filling the hydroelectric dam's reservoir in July and August, contends that the project is vital for the energy needs of its 110 million-strong population.

"An agreement on the GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) can be reached," Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), told a UN Security Council meeting.

"To reach an optimal agreement, trust, transparency and open engagement will

be key," she said at the meeting, organized at the request of Tunisia on behalf of Cairo and Khartoum.

While progress has been made in many areas of the negotiations, consensus "has not been reached regarding some critical aspects, including: arrangements for management of protracted drought; development upstream and downstream of the GERD; and a dispute resolution mechanism," the official said.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the dam was an "existential threat" to Egypt, calling for "a legally binding agreement that enables Ethiopia to achieve its developmental objectives."

The members of the Security Council encouraged the three countries to overcome their differences towards an agreement under the aegis of the African Union.

But the AU's management of the crisis is at an impasse, Shoukry said, calling for the council to adopt a draft resolution proposed by Tunisia.

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