

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

Qatar, EU call rights abuses ‘disappointing’

AFP, Doha

Qatar and the EU’s top diplomats yesterday labelled a recent string of human rights abuses in Afghanistan “disappointing”, with Doha encouraging the Taliban to look to Qatar for how to run an Islamic system.

The Taliban publicly strung up four alleged kidnappers from cranes in Herat last week and older girls are still unable to resume their studies weeks into the new academic year.

“The recent actions that we have seen unfortunately in Afghanistan, it has been very disappointing to see some steps being taken backward,”

Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said at a media briefing in Doha.

Qatar has become a key broker in Afghanistan following last month’s withdrawal of US forces, helping to evacuate thousands of foreigners and Afghans, engaging the new Taliban rulers and supporting operations at Kabul airport.



A Taliban fighter (L) makes a hand gesture asking the photojournalists to stop covering a demonstration by women protesters in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US ‘lost’ 20-yr Afghan war

Top general concedes; senior defense officials blame Trump-Taliban deal for Afghan govt’s collapse

AGENCIES

The top US general conceded in a stark admission on Wednesday that the United States “lost” the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

“It is clear, it is obvious to all of us, that the war in Afghanistan did not end on the terms we wanted, with the Taliban in power in Kabul,” General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee.

“The war was a strategic failure,” Milley told a committee hearing about the US troop pullout from Afghanistan and the chaotic evacuation from the capital Kabul.

“It wasn’t lost in the last 20 days or even 20 months,” Milley said.

“There’s a cumulative effect to a series of strategic decisions that go way back,” said the general, the top military



advisor to President Joe Biden, who ordered an end to the 20-year US troop presence in Afghanistan.

“Whenever you get some phenomenon like a war that is lost -- and it has been, in the sense of we accomplished our strategic task of protecting America against Al-Qaeda, but certainly the end state is a whole lot different than what we wanted,” Milley said.

“So whenever a phenomenon like

that happens, there’s an awful lot of causal factors,” he said. “And we’re going to have to figure that out. A lot of lessons learned here.”

Milley listed a number of factors responsible for the US defeat going back to a missed opportunity to capture or kill Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora soon after the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, reports AFP.

Top US defence officials also said the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan can be traced back to a deal between the group and the Trump administration.

The so-called Doha agreement was signed in February 2020 and set a date for the US to withdraw its troops. General Frank McKenzie said the deal had a “really pernicious effect” on the Afghan government and military, reports BBC.

POST-COUP MYANMAR

‘Urgent’ response needed to solve crisis: Guterres

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an “urgent” international response to the political crisis created in Myanmar by the February 1 military coup, in a new report released by the United Nations on Wednesday.

In the document on “the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar,” the UN chief also said he feared that the military’s grip on power would become increasingly difficult to counter.

“It is urgent to mount a unified international and regional response to help to put Myanmar back on the path to democratic reform,” he said in the document dated August 31.

No explanation was given by the UN for the long delay in its publication. The text was approved by 119 countries, with 36 including China abstaining and one, Belarus, voting against.

The international effort “must be accompanied by the immediate release of President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other government officials,” Guterres said in his report.

There must also be “immediate humanitarian access and assistance, especially to vulnerable communities, among them the Rohingya Muslims, many of whom are living in exile in Bangladesh and elsewhere,” he added.

MORE NEWS

CNN blocks access to its Facebook page in Australia

CNN has blocked access to its Facebook page in Australia after a court ruled media companies were liable for defamatory user comments on their stories. Yesterday, Australian users trying to navigate to CNN’s Facebook page received a message that the content was restricted. Australia’s High Court upheld a ruling earlier this month that held media companies responsible for user comments on a story, opening them to potential prosecution under the country’s heavy defamation laws. The US-based news operation said on Wednesday it had asked Facebook to help publishers disable the comments on their platform in Australia but the tech giant “chose not to do so.” “We are disappointed that Facebook, once again, has failed to ensure its platform is a place for credible journalism...,” a CNN spokesperson said in a statement on the outlet’s website.

Israeli fire kills three Palestinians in day of unrest

Three Palestinians were killed yesterday by Israeli fire, including a woman who tried to stab officers in Jerusalem, a militant shot during West Bank clashes and a Gazan who approached the border fence. The violence comes days after an Israeli raid on militants in the occupied West Bank left five Palestinians dead. At dawn in Jerusalem, the sound of gunshots rang through the Old City, with the body of a woman lying on a stone street that leads to the Al-Aqsa mosque, an AFP journalist said. She was later draped in a survival blanket. Police said she had attempted to stab officers after being stopped for a check because her conduct aroused suspicion.



Russia reports record virus deaths for third day

Russia yesterday reported its highest coronavirus death toll for a third day in a row, as infections spike driven by the contagious Delta variant and slow vaccination rates. A government tally reported 867 fatalities over the past 24 hours and 23,888 new cases. The new figure brings the country’s total deaths from Covid-19 to 207,255 -- the highest in Europe. Independent experts have accused authorities of downplaying the severity of the outbreak. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia’s vaccination rate was “still insufficient.” “We need to more actively continue to explain that the only thing that saves lives is the vaccine,” Peskov told reporters yesterday. The world’s fifth worst-hit country with more than seven million infections, Russia has seen cases climb over the past month as vaccinations stalled.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



OCTOBER 1

- 1918** - Arab forces aided by the British under T. E. Lawrence -- Lawrence of Arabia -- captured Damascus from the Turks.
- 1946** - The International War Crimes Tribunal in Nuremburg sentenced 12 Nazi leaders to death -- the first war criminals to be convicted of crimes against humanity.
- 1949** - The People’s Republic of China was formed with Mao Zedong as its leader.
- 2008** - The US Congress approved a landmark deal ending a three-decade ban on US nuclear trade with India.

SOURCE: REUTERS

US offer of dialogue a ‘petty trick’: N Korea’s Kim

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un condemned a US offer of dialogue as a “petty trick”, state media reported yesterday, and accused the Joe Biden administration of continuing a hostile policy against his nuclear-armed country.

Talks between Pyongyang and Washington have been effectively at a standstill since the collapse of a 2019 Hanoi summit between Kim and then-president Donald Trump over sanctions relief and what North Korea would be willing to give up in return.

Under Biden, the United States has repeatedly offered to meet North Korean representatives anywhere, at any time, without preconditions, while saying it will seek denuclearisation.

But Kim condemned the declarations as “no more than a petty trick for deceiving the international community and hiding its hostile acts”, the official KCNA news agency reported.

The new administration was pursuing “military threats” and a “hostile policy” unchanged from the past, “but employs more cunning ways and methods in doing so”, he said in a lengthy address to the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), North

Korea’s rubber-stamp parliament.

Pyongyang has been largely biding its time in recent months as it assessed the Biden government and focused on domestic issues.

It has been behind a rigid self-imposed blockade since early last year to protect itself from the coronavirus pandemic, with the economy suffering as a result and trade with key partner China dwindling to a trickle.

But Kim’s speech was the latest in a series of actions with international ramifications this month.

This week, North Korea tested what it said was a hypersonic gliding missile, and earlier this month announced it had successfully fired a long-range cruise missile, after holding a scaled-down military parade.

Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes are banned under UN Security Council resolutions, and it is subject to multiple international sanctions as a result.

The United States condemned this week’s launch, but in response to Kim’s comments said it “harbours no hostile intent toward the DPRK” -- the acronym for the North’s official name.



Relatives of inmates wait for information outside a prison in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Wednesday, after a riot occurred. Ecuador declared on Wednesday a state of exception for the prison system, in crisis due to overpopulation and violence between drug gangs, after a riot that left more than 100 prisoners dead and 52 wounded.

PHOTO: AFP

‘Someone lied’

French FM accuses Australia of submarine betrayal in latest broadside

AGENCIES

France has accused Australia of lying shortly before Canberra cancelled a major submarine contract, with the French foreign minister declaring “someone lied”.

With no sign of any imminent easing of tensions between the two countries, Jean-Yves Le Drian told a parliamentary hearing that Australia had never expressed doubts about the €56bn (A\$90bn) submarine contract or the strategic Indo-Pacific pact before breaking the contract.

“Everything I have told you is confirmed by the letter I received on 15 September from the Australian ministry of defence that said everything is OK let’s continue,” Le Drian said.

The French foreign minister said this suggested “someone lied”. He



added: “Something doesn’t add up and we don’t know what.”

Le Drian reiterated that French contractor Naval Group had received a letter on the same day the contract was broken saying Australia was “satisfied” with the strategic review of the submarines and was ready for the “rapid signature for the second phase of the programme”.

As a result, the decision to break the multibillion submarine contract was met with “stupor” in France, he said.

The letter in question has not been publicly released. The Guardian has contacted the Australian government for comment, but it has previously played down the letter’s significance, reports The Guardian.

Last week a spokesperson for Australia’s Department of Defence told the Guardian: “On 15 September 2021, Naval Group was advised that the formal exit of a system review had been achieved as required under the contractual arrangements in place at the time.”

The spokesperson added: “This correspondence did not refer to or authorise commencement of the next phase of the program, which remained subject to the announcement of decisions by the Australian government.”

EVERARD’S MURDER

UK cop given whole-life jail term

AFP, London

A British police officer who falsely arrested a woman for breaking coronavirus restrictions, then kidnapped, raped and murdered her, was given a rare whole-life jail term yesterday.

Judge Adrian Fulford told Wayne Couzens, 48, his offences were “grotesque”, after he snatched Sarah Everard off the streets of south London in March. Everard’s disappearance sparked one of Britain’s most high-profile missing persons investigations and protests calling for better safety for women in public spaces.

NEW CONVICTION OVER ILLEGAL CAMPAIGN FINANCING

France’s ex-president Sarkozy likely to avoid jail

REUTERS, PARIS

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was handed a one-year prison sentence by a Paris court yesterday after being found guilty of illegal campaign financing over his failed 2012 re-election bid.

Sarkozy, 66, is unlikely to go to jail. He will appeal the sentence, a move that in effect suspends it, and the judge said he could serve the sentence at home with an electronic tag.

But the second conviction <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-politics-sarkozy-verdict-idUSKCN2AT1VG> this year for Sarkozy is a stunning fall from grace for the man who led France from 2007 to 2012 and retains influence among conservatives.

The two convictions could force Sarkozy to play a more discreet role in next year’s presidential election.

He had not planned to be a candidate but, as a popular figure on the right, he would be expected to support his party’s candidate.

Sarkozy’s conservative party, prosecutors said, spent nearly double the 22.5 million euros (currently \$19.2 million) allowed under electoral law on extravagant campaign rallies and then hired a friendly public relations agency to hide the cost.

Sarkozy has denied wrongdoing. He said he was not involved in the logistics of his campaign for a second term as president or in how money was spent during the election run-up.

“Can you imagine me going into a meeting to discuss the cost of flags?” he told the court in June. “I had too much to do.”

“From the moment I was told things were in order, I had no reason to give it more thought.”