

UNSC ends peacekeeping mission in Mali

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council has ended a decade-old peacekeeping mission in Mali, whose military junta has aligned with Russia and demanded the withdrawal of the international force battling jihadists.

Bowing to the principle that peacekeepers need the consent of the host government, the Security Council on Friday voted unanimously to start immediately winding down the mission despite fears by Western powers of new instability in the troubled African nation.

The vote came two weeks after Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop stunned the Security Council by calling the major UN operation known as Minusma a "failure" and urging its end.

Mali's relations with the United Nations have deteriorated sharply since a 2020 coup brought to power a military regime that also severed defense cooperation with France, the former colonial power.

The junta instead has rallied behind Moscow and brought in the Wagner Group, the ruthless mercenaries involved in a mutiny against Russian President Vladimir Putin last week.

Under the resolution led by France, the peacekeepers were supposed to cease their main activity from yesterday and focus on departure, although they will still be empowered to protect against "imminent threats of violence to civilians" through September.

Minusma has been the most costly mission for the UN, at \$1.2 billion a year, and 174 peacekeepers have died since its creation in 2013.



A burning barricade is seen as unrest continues for the fourth night following the death of a 17-year-old teenager killed by a French police officer during a traffic stop, in Nanterre, Paris suburb, France, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US had no role in Russia mutiny

US media say CIA director called Kremlin to avoid misunderstanding

AGENCIES

CIA Director William Burns called Russian spy chief Sergei Naryshkin after last week's aborted mutiny in Russia to assure the Kremlin that the United States had no role in it, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Burns' phone call with Naryshkin, the head of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service, took place this week and was the highest-level contact between the two governments since the attempted mutiny, the Wall Street Journal said.

The boss of Russia's Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, shocked the world by leading last week's armed revolt, only to abruptly call it off as his

fighters approached Moscow.

President Joe Biden said on Monday the brief uprising by Russian mercenaries against the Kremlin was part of a struggle within the Russian system and that the United States and its allies were not involved in it.

Meanwhile, a US official confirmed to AFP Friday that William Burns recently traveled to Ukraine where he met with intelligence counterparts and President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The trip — not reported at the time — comes as Kyiv's brigades pursue a counteroffensive in their nation's east and south against Russian forces, launched earlier this month after weeks of anticipation.

During his trip Burns reaffirmed "the US commitment to sharing intelligence to help Ukraine defend against Russian aggression," the US official said.

According to The Washington Post, which first reported the visit, Ukrainian officials shared plans to claw back Russian-occupied territory and begin ceasefire negotiations by the end of the year.

Burns "traveled to Ukraine as he has done regularly since the beginning of Russia's recent aggression more than a year ago," the US official said. The Post reported that the visit occurred in June.

The trip took place before the 24-hour insurrection by the leader of the Wagner private

military company, Yevgeny Prigozhin, according to the official.

The mutiny, which was widely seen as the biggest threat to Kremlin authority in decades, "was not a topic of discussion," the official added.

On Tuesday the United States announced a fresh \$500 million package of arms to bolster the counteroffensive, including armored vehicles, precision munitions and mine-clearing equipment.

However, the country's military commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny said Ukraine's counteroffensive plans are hobbled by the lack of adequate firepower, from modern fighter jets to artillery ammunition.

'Rebels attack China convoy' in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

The Myanmar junta yesterday accused an armed ethnic group of attacking a vehicle convoy containing Chinese military personnel who were travelling to a meeting on border security, a claim the rebels denied. Myanmar has been in chaos since the military ousted democratically-elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from office in a 2021 coup. On Tuesday, a vehicle convoy containing Chinese military representatives and Myanmar counterparts headed to Myitkyina in northern Kachin state came under fire. "We can confirm that (Kachin Independence Army) members attacked the convoy," junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said in an audio message. The junta said no one was wounded or killed in the incident. But the KIA denied responsibility.

US rejoins UNESCO

AFP, Paris

The United States on Friday rejoined UNESCO, which it had quit during the Trump administration, despite opposition from Russia and China. Former president Donald Trump announced in 2017 that he was pulling the United States out of UNESCO, accusing the body of bias against Israel. The decision took effect in 2018. An extraordinary session of the UN body's General Assembly on Friday voted overwhelmingly for the return of the United States. A total of 132 members voted in favour, 10 against while 15 abstained.

Bolsonaro barred from public office

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil's far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro vowed Friday to appeal a court ruling barring him from public office for eight years over unfounded attacks he had made against the country's voting system. The ruling renders the 68-year-old ineligible to stand in the next presidential election in 2026 — opening the contest for a new leader for Brazil's political right. Bolsonaro was tried by the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) over claims he made in a televised meeting with foreign diplomats in July 2022, during which he claimed electronic voting machines in use since 1996 compromised election transparency. He gave no proof for the claims he made just three months ahead of his election defeat to leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Over Tk 13,110cr anomalies in Janata Bank

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the large loan amounts beyond the permissible limit and waived interest by violating rules.

"The audit report reflects the need for the authorities to focus on strengthening the internal control system of the audited branches, complying with the prevailing rules and regulations in collection and expenditure of government funds," it said.

It called on the bank management to ensure the same types of irregularities are not repeated and its recommendations are implemented.

Foremost amongst the irregularities is the rescheduling of AnonTex Group's loans amounting to Tk 5,243.6 crore by violating the terms of the MoU the bank had struck with the central bank as well the BRPD circular by the bank's Janata Bhaban corporate branch in Motijheel.

For rescheduling the amount, the bank took just a 1 percent down payment from AnonTex instead of the minimum 2 percent.

"It was not right to reschedule loans that have become classified due to forgery and money laundering," said the audit report.

The branch also extended generous letter of credit (LC) facilities to six subsidiaries of AnonTex Group from 2015 to 2020 despite the client's failure to clear their previous dues. Not just that, it even honoured AnonTex's LCs by creating demand loans. Those loans have defaulted too. And yet, its six subsidiaries got further LC benefits.

The amount outstanding is Tk 558.9 crore.

In its response, the bank said that it cleared AnonTex's LCs with its own funds to preserve the bank's reputation among banks abroad.

AnonTex did not receive any new LC facility after February 2018, the bank said.

Then its Sadharan Bima Bhaban corporate branch in Chattogram extended credit beyond the permissible amount to S Alam Refined Sugar Industries, a subsidiary of the controversial S Alam Group, without the head office's approval, which violates rules. The outstanding amount is Tk 1,248.3 crore.

The audit also unearthed irregularities involving Tk 1,070.7 crore by the branch pertaining to another S Alam subsidiary. The branch adjusted the liabilities of Global Trading Limited with amounts from its sister concerns S Alam Cold Roll Steels and S Alam Vegetable Oil Mills Ltd, in a breach of central bank rules. It also provided credit to Global Trading beyond the permissible limit.

The Kemal Attaturk branch extended back-to-back LC facilities against fake export bills. The exports never happened, so demand loans were created. Those loans had defaulted and the bank rescheduled the loans, which stood at Tk 267.5 crore, without taking any collateral.

The bank's Motijheel branch extended fresh LCs to BR Spinning Mills from January 2015 to June 2020 despite the company's failure to export goods multiple times. The amounts were never cleared, leaving Janata owing Tk 806.4 crore from the textile manufacturer.

The bank also owes Tk 168.2 crore from Doreen Garments, thanks to its local office extending huge amounts of back-to-back LCs against exports that were never shipped.

The local office also extended a range of credit to Al-Madina Tannery without proper due diligence. The amounts had defaulted but the

branch showed them as regular without taking the compromise amount, which violates the BRPD circular. Janata now owes Tk 102.1 crore from the tannery.

The bank has dues of Tk 111.6 crore, thanks to its Khulna corporate branch extending loans beyond the limit five times in seven years, rescheduling those and extending the moratorium facility multiple times.

The branch also rescheduled loans of three concerns of Lockpur Group without taking adequate collateral, which violates BB rules. The amount outstanding is Tk 120.4 crore.

Cambodian PM kicks off campaign in one-sided election

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen kicked off a three-week election campaign yesterday, with his party poised to sweep the one-sided contest after the top challenger was barred from taking part.

Cambodians will vote on July 23 in an election widely seen as a sham after authorities denied registration to the Candlelight Party — considered the only viable rival to Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party.

Hun Sen — who has ruled Cambodia for 38 years — told a sea of tens of thousands of supporters dressed in party T-shirts and hats that his government would build more roads and schools while boosting wages and economic growth.

development.

Hasina asked them to pray for her so that she can serve the people.

The PM departed Kotalipara for Tungipara in the afternoon.

At Tungipara, the premier paid tributes to Bangabandhu by placing a wreath at his mausoleum. She also offered lateha and joined a munajat there.

The AL president is scheduled to exchange greetings with local party leaders and activists, public representatives and ordinary people in Tungipara today morning.

She is expected to return to Dhaka today.

Cast ballots for AL in next polls

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people and make socio-economic and infrastructural development."

The PM said she must fulfill the goals for which her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made the country independent.

She said her government has improved the country's image across the world. She blasted those who don't notice any development.

Earlier, Hasina opened the newly constructed office of Kotalipara upazila AL.

The PM arrived at Kotalipara by road at 11:27am.


Earlier, she left the Gono Bhaban in the capital for Gopalganj on a two-day visit to her home district.




PM's ICT Affairs Adviser Sajeeb Wazed accompanied her.

With colourful posters, banners and placards adorning many roads, Gopalganj district wore a festive look yesterday.

During the exchange of Eid greetings, many local AL leaders and public representatives thanked the PM for giving them the opportunity to share their feelings with her.

They also wished her victory in the next parliamentary polls for the sake of the country's further



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