

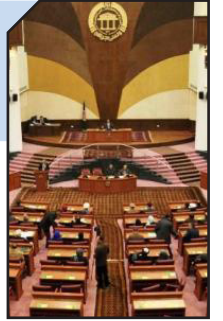


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# Heart of Asia

*Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region*

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10 afs



**Saudi Arabia renews support to Afghan peace process**

Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanef Atmar has held a meeting with his Saudi Counterpart Prince Faisal Bin-e-Farhan Al Saud on the sidelines of the 47th Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Niger's capital city, Niamey. Minister Atmar spoke with Prince Faisal about the importance of the role of Saudi scholars in securing peace and ending the war in Afghanistan, highlighting the role that the Islamic scholars play in securing world and Afghan peace. While congratulating the successful of the Afghanistan Conference in Geneva, the Saudi Foreign Minister called Saudi Arabia a supporter and fundamental partner of peace in Afghanistan. Speaking about the importance of the regional consensus on peace in Afghanistan, Prince Faisal assured Minister Atmar that his country would not refrain from any cooperation ... **P3**



**Massive PTM rally seeks end to Afghan war**

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has underlined an end to the war in neighbouring Afghanistan. At a massive rally in Balochistan's border town of Chaman on Friday also sought an immediate end to extrajudicial killings in Pakistan. Thousands of people attending the Pashtun long march called for an end to the Afghan conflict and sincere action against terror safe havens. Manzoor Pashteen, head of the rights-based alliance, asked the state to ensure an end to extrajudicial killings. Organisers hailed the PTM rally as yet another successful gathering, which pulled thousands of disappointed and grieving Pashtuns. Pashteen asked the rulers to shun the policy of good and bad Taliban, produce the missing people in courts and end extrajudicial killings. ... **P2**

## U.S. Closes 10 Bases Around Afghanistan



The U.S. has closed at least 10 bases across Afghanistan since the signing of a deal with the Taliban in February, Afghan and US officials told the Washington Post. And on Friday night CNN reported the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz is being moved back into the Persian Gulf region along with other warships to provide combat support and air cover as US troops withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan by January 15 under

President Trump's orders, according to a defense official. The Washington Post report said that the base closures are part of the complete withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan outlined in the US-Taliban deal. An Afghan official and a US official on condition of anonymity confirmed to the Washington Post the closure of the bases, several of which were previously unreported.

Little is known about what remains of those bases, the report said, adding that many were in Afghanistan's most volatile provinces where US support for Afghan operations has been critical in pushing back the Taliban. Some had been completely handed over to Afghan security forces, the report said. Others may have been vacated and left in place in a way in which they could be occupied again in the future

if US and Afghan officials consider it necessary, it added. It is also unclear how much equipment — more difficult to move than people — is left at each of the closed installations. Troops withdrawal from Afghanistan US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended President Trump's plan to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan to 2,500 by mid-January, saying that getting American troops out of "harm's way" in Afghanistan "is the mission set." Quoted in a report by Fox News on Thursday, Pompeo said no troops in the country would not mean no security for Americans. "President Trump has been very clear we're going to protect and secure the homeland, but we're not going to have our young men and women in harm's way when it doesn't deliver real security benefits for the United States and for our allies," Pompeo said as quoted by Fox News. "The president to date has said that we're going to go from where we are today, something just over 4,000, to around 2,500" troops, Pompeo said as quoted by Fox News. "The threat from terrorism around the world — from Islamic extremism, Islamic terrorism — is real. It doesn't just emanate from ... **P3**

**Two Bomb Blasts Wounded At Least 7 in Kabul**

At least seven people were wounded when two explosions happened in Kabul city on Saturday morning, Kabul Police confirmed. Ferdaws Faramarz, Kabul Police spokesman told Reporterly that at least three people were wounded in the first blast which was a result of an attached IED targeting a Ford type vehicle at around 07:40am in Omid Sabz township. According to Police, at least four more people were wounded in the second blast which was occurred in Khair Khana area of Kabul as a result of an IED which targeted a Land Cruiser type vehicle at around 08:00am. No group has claimed responsibility for the blasts so far.



**Turkmenistan committed to promoting socio-economic development of Afghanistan**

Turkmenistan is committed to promoting the socio-economic development of Afghanistan, Trend reports with reference to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan's commitment is shown in infrastructure projects initiated by Turkmenistan, including the construction of social facilities on the territory of Afghanistan on a gratuitous basis. The construction of the TAPI gas pipeline, electric power and communication lines along the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan route, as well as railway lines connecting Turkmenistan with Afghanistan and other countries in the region is important for the Afghan economy. The representatives of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning Land Acquisition for the Afghan portion of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas



pipeline project. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline (TAPI), also known as Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline, is a natural gas pipeline being developed by the Galkynysh - TAPI Pipeline Company Limited with the participation of the Asian Development Bank. The pipeline will transport natural gas from the Galkynysh Gas Field in Turkmenistan through Afghanistan

into Pakistan and then to India. Construction on the project started in Turkmenistan on 13 December 2015. The length of the Turkmen section of the TAPI pipeline, the construction of which was launched in December 2015, will be 205 kilometers (the main operations are carried out on the 120th kilometer). The pipeline will pass through the Afghan cities of Herat and Kandahar ... **P2**

### Lukashenko...

by a landslide, garnering 80.10% of the vote. His closest rival in the race, Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, came in second, with 10.12% of the ballot. However, she refused to recognize the election's outcome, and left Belarus for Lithuania. After the results of the exit polls were announced late on August 9, mass protests erupted in downtown Minsk and other Belarusian cities. During the early post-election period, the rallies snowballed into fierce clashes between the protesters and police. The current unrest is being cheered on by the opposition's Coordination Council, which has been beating the drum for more protests. In response, the Belarusian authorities have castigated the ongoing turmoil and demanded that these unauthorized demonstrations be stopped.

Lukashenko has repeatedly stated that the Belarusian protests are staged by the West.

### Massive PTM...

PTM lawmaker Mohsin Dawar praised the public for the success of the rally. "Congratulations and well done PTM chairman for such a successful rally. PTM is a reality that cannot be wished away.

The legislator said the grand rally was a public referendum for justice for the victims of terrorism.

### Turkmenistan...

(816 kilometers), through the cities of Quetta and Multan across Pakistani territory (819 kilometers), and reach the city of Fazilka in India.

The pipeline's design capacity is planned to be 33 billion cubic meters of gas per year, and the project's cost - about \$8 billion.

By: Binoy Kampmark

# Australian war crimes allegations in Afghanistan

In 2016, Australia's Special Operations Commander, Major General Jeff Sengelman, was troubled enough to concede that, 'A growing body of actual and anecdotal evidence from the past decade suggests that the personal and professional ethics of some [in the Australian Defence Forces] have been deeply compromised.' He was particularly concerned by alleged misdeeds allegedly committed ADF personnel in Afghanistan.

The findings of the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry, a four-year investigation released last week, albeit in heavily redacted form, bore out much of those concerns. Compiled by a team of investigators led by NSW Supreme Court of Appeal Justice Paul Brereton, the inquiry found 'credible evidence' that 39 Afghan non-combatants and prisoners were allegedly killed by Australian special forces personnel. These findings involved prisoner executions, the planting of weapons upon the slain victims and cover-ups along the chain of command. Two others were reportedly also treated with cruelty while under the control of Australian personnel. The report recommends the referral of 36 'matters' to the Australian Federal Police for criminal investigation, spanning 23 incidents and the involvement of 19 individuals.

There had been many dress rehearsals prior to the report's findings to reflect upon the nature of responsibility for such crimes. But after September 11 2001, the cult of Anzac and the elevated standing of Australia's armed forces became an unimpeachable standard of public service. That such forces might have engaged in acts of cold brutality did not sit well with such ennobling mythology, being, in the words of the ABC's political editor Andrew Probyn, 'shaken by a murderous few with maximum firepower and discretion but minimum oversight.'

In view of such a shaking experience, the discussion in Australia as to how such atrocities are to be approached is telling. The call for responsibility has varied by degrees. Most tend to some variant of the rotten apple theory: a few particular fruits that may be isolated and extruded from the barrel. Culpability can thereby be confined, preserving the integrity of other military personnel and, importantly, political decision makers.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, for instance, is doing



his best to limit culpability: these alleged atrocities involved the 'disturbing and distressing' conduct of the abominable few. Thinking less of the Afghan victims, his concern has been for the innocent service personnel who have donned military uniform, that they 'in no way feel reflected upon by the actions alleged of a number, a small number within our Defence Force.' The Brereton report does its bit to sharpen focus upon the alleged criminal conduct of the few. The 'fog of war' defence, for instance, is dismissed, suggesting a narrow, criminal focus for a few steely killers. 'None of these are incidents of disputable decisions made under pressure in the heat of battle.'

ADF Chief Angus Campbell has adopted a workmanlike, administrative line by promising to disband the SAS's 2nd Squadron while referring individual personnel 'alleged of unlawful criminal conduct' to the Office of the Special Investigator. As for superiors and those along the chain? 'Individuals alleged to be negligent in the performance of their duty will be managed through administrative and disciplinary processes.'

Independent Senator Rex Patrick, himself a former ADF member, suggests holding individual perpetrators to account and 'those in the ADF chain of command who were responsible for the units and operations in

question.' A bit broader focus than Campbell's, but not by much.

Conspicuously absent in the broader discussion is the role played by Australia's top military commanders and, importantly, the political decision makers behind deploying such troops. John Howard, the prime minister responsible for committing Australian forces to Afghanistan in 2001, was very quick in responding to the report's findings by praising 'the bravery and professionalism of those [Australian] forces' while carefully underlining the abhorrent 'behaviour of a small group of special forces personnel who, it is claimed, amongst other things, were responsible for the unlawful killing of 39 Afghan citizens.'

Such methods of isolating the significance of military brutality has precedent. The killing of 500 unarmed women, children and elderly men in the Vietnamese hamlet of My Lai on March 16 1968 by soldiers of the US Americal Division convulsed debate on the depth, and extent of responsibility, in the United States. Despite complicity, officer cover-ups and institutional denial, only one conviction, that of First Lieutenant William Calley Jr., resulted. As international law academic and activist Richard A. Falk suggested in 1974, it was 'clear that My Lai as a publicly condemned ...

P3

By Raja Hamza Anwar

## Negotiating the Afghan constitution

The recent diplomatic exchanges between Pakistan, Taliban and the Afghan government have marked a savoury start right from Abdullah Abdullah's visit to Pakistan this year that was followed by Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Afghanistan. The United States on the other hand is in a haste to put a lid on the simmering squabble they have connived to create. Until now, America has bypassed the Afghan government in the brokering of a peace agreement by unilaterally initiating negotiations with the Taliban. America's handling of the negotiations serves to exude a strong sense of dominance that the Taliban have at the negotiating table, due to their unmatched appetite for violence.

The inevitable scenario would be a constitutional arrangement where the Taliban's idea of an ultra-

conservative national identity is likely to be imposed on all Afghan stakeholders. In such a constitutional set-up, the rights of the minorities to freely profess their faith as well as women to have the basic right to education or, at the least, the freedom to move without being accompanied by a male family member, may not be embraced by the Taliban.

In the Afghan context, constitution-making will be a particularly sensitive issue as debates and negotiations will be heavily polarised and torn between ideological lines. No constitution is a self-executory instrument and it depends on the people for its enforcement. Therefore, the development of consensus is a pre-requisite of constitution-making, as it represents being legitimated by the people. With a lack of shared values that would naturally play a cohesive role

in the constitutional dialogue in Afghanistan, the initiation of any intra-peace dialogue can potentially conflagrate the differences that would risk turning constitutional debates into battle zones. Then, instead of fostering compromise between the government and the Taliban, the constitution-making will become a source of exacerbating tensions which, in Afghanistan's scenario, would skid the state back into violence.

To avoid the Talibanisation of the negotiation process, Afghan constitution makers should avoid making decisions about certain fundamental rights and values at this critical juncture. Deliberate omission and avoiding reaching a conclusive judgment regarding contentious issues will avoid the possibility of an overt conflict. Postponing controversial decisions ... P3

## No use of Afghan soil against Pakistan: Diplomat



The Afghan ambassador in Islamabad says the use of Afghan territory will not be allowed against Pakistan.

Najibullah Ali Khel held out the assurance at a meeting with Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on National Security Dr Moeed Yusuf.

The special advisor raised the issue of Indian terrorist activities in Pakistan during talks with Ali Khel in Islamabad.

Dr Moeed Yusuf and the Afghan diplomat also discussed matters pertaining to regional peace and security.

Dr Moeed also discussed Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to Kabul, saying the two countries had agreed to work together

to resolve security issues.

He remarked: "The region can only move forward if Pakistan and Afghanistan are united in their thinking." Prosperity in both countries would come from mutual relations and trade.

"The prime minister's visit to Kabul encouraged mutual understanding," Dr Moeed said.

"Pakistan's economic security is linked to stability in Afghanistan as ties with Central Asian countries will benefit the two countries," the advisor added.

He accused India of trying to destabilise Pakistan where the latter was making continuous efforts for peace in Afghanistan.

## Wolesi Jirga approves 2021 mid-year budget

The Wolesi Jirga or lower house of Parliament on Saturday approved mid-year budget for fiscal year 2021. The house had earlier rejected the draft budget over allocation of 7.5 billion afghanis as separate fund for the Operational Unit of the Presidential Palace. The draft again landed in the lower house after some changes, which was approved by lawmakers. Wolesi Jirga members had earlier said the Operational Unit was not a recognizable body for them. Mir Afghan Safi, head of Wolesi Jirga Finance and Budgetary Commission, said one of the contradictory issues between the Commission and the Finance Ministry was the inclusion of 8.4 billion afghanis loan in the budget, which was unprecedented.

The ministry should provide a separate bill of the loan to the house. He said after the house rejected the draft budget when it was first tabled, the ministry brought positive changes to the draft budget and in the joint meeting of Wolesi Jirga Commissions, all voted for approval of the document. Without going into details, he said the commission made changes in the normal and development sections of the budget. Abdul Rauf Enami, another member of the Wolesi Jirga, said: "Allocation of 7.5 billion dollars for the Operation Unit of the Presidential Palace was distributed to other institutions after it was rejected by the house. Currently Operational Wing gets 5 billion afghanis." But Khan AqaRezaee, member of the Internal Security Commission, said: "I



have objection over the performance of the Finance and Budgetary Commissions' work, first they termed the draft budget against the law, saying billions of afghanis have been allocated against the law to the Operational Unit, a body not accountable to the house and corrupt at its core." He added the Ministry of Public Health

had demanded 50 million afs but it was allocated in 830 million afs. "Who made this generosity? From where the Finance Commission provided this amount?" Finally, Ahmad Shah Ramazan, who chaired the session, asked lawmakers for voting on the draft budget which was approved with majority votes.

### U.S. Closes 10...

Afghanistan," Pompeo said as quoted by Fox News. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg this week said that an early and hasty withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan might endanger the gains "we have made, and that's a risky project." He said the US's position on the withdrawal is clear as the United States is going to reduce its presence in Afghanistan from roughly 4,500 to around 2,500 troops. Violence remains high in Afghanistan despite efforts for peace. Last week, the Defense Ministry reported clashes in more than 20 provinces.

### Iran's Khamenei...

while stopping short of calling for retaliation. Government spokesman Ali Rabie on Saturday said the "aggressor will definitely be punished but not on the playing field he defines," indirectly suggesting that the government is not looking at military retaliation now. On Friday evening, a group of protesters assembled in front of Rouhani's office in Tehran calling for revenge. Security analysts say the growing calls for revenge have put Rouhani's government in a bind, as it had recently extended an olive branch to the new US administration. Officials in Iran see the hand of both Israel and the US in the killing, coming just days after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Tel Aviv. Fakhriyadeh had for long been on the radar of Israel's spy agency. In 2018, he had been mentioned by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a presentation about Iran's nuclear program. His killing is the latest in a series of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists over the years. Iran has always seen Israel's hand in them.

### Saudi Arabia...

for the success of the Afghan peace process. Prince Faisal invited the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs to visit Saudi Arabia and talk about the expansion of bilateral cooperation and the peace process in Afghanistan with prominent members of the Saudi government. Thanking the Saudi government for its continued support to the government and the Afghan peace process, Atmar accepted Prince Faisal's invitation and pledged to visit Saudi Arabia in the near future, given the prevalence of the coronavirus.

### Australian war...

massacre was artificially isolated from the overall framework of the war.' The focus on culture — the trendy word of the moment regarding Australia's special forces and one used 122 times in the Brereton report — modifies the moral context of human agency. A culture suggests environmental control and contamination, not high-end command responsibility. Spot the culture; reform it. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd sees it in such terms. 'The Chief of the Defence Force now has the urgent responsibility to reform the culture of this units and their command structures.' The gates of accountability, in other words, stop before Parliament, The Lodge and Kirribilli House. They lie in military 'structures', not political decisions that led to 20 rotations involving 3,000 personnel in a seemingly interminable war that former Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared was neither won, nor lost. The report states as much: 'It was not a risk [the

unlawful killings] to which any government, of any persuasion, was ever alerted. Ministers were briefed that the task was manageable. The responsibility lies in the Australian Defence Force, not with the government of the day.' This selective, and slanted view, proved unconvincing to those persuaded by the broader school of accountability. Western Australia Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John was clear that the line between the alleged atrocities in Afghanistan and Australia's institutions is uncomfortably clearer than one might think, not merely the isolated blood-soaked work of a 'couple of rogue SAS soldiers'. According to the transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, an institution can be seen to be the lengthened shadow of one man. If institutions are shadows of men, they are cast far and wide. 'The politicians who sent [the special forces] to #Afghanistan & kept them there for over a decade,' tweeted Senator Steele-John, 'must be held to

account, as must the chain of command who either didn't know when they should've or knew & failed to act'. One thing that the Brereton report does acknowledge, with logical force, is who is not responsible for the alleged crimes. 'Perhaps the single most effective indication that there is a commitment to cultural reform is the demonstration that those who have been instrumental in the exposure of misconduct, or are known to have acted with propriety and probity, are regarded as role models.' It took the tireless work of helicopter gunner Ronald Ridenhour to expose the atrocity of My Lai. It has taken the revelations of Major David McBride, aided by ABC journalists Dan Oakes and Sam Clark, to bring the abuses of Australian special forces to light in a public forum. Yet McBride remains the target of prosecution, facing five charges of pilfering Commonwealth property and disclosing sensitive material to journalists. Reforming that punitive culture might be a start.

### Negotiating the...

in Afghanistan's context, such as determining the rights of minorities and women at the start of the constitution-making process, would create an environment for continuous political interactions between the Taliban and the government that may eventually mature into the dispensation of these rights. Proponents of the neo-liberal idea would certainly be exasperated by this incremental process for tightening the noose around fundamental rights that have become the hallmark of progressiveness. On the contrary, incremental constitutional development rests on the evolution of societal norms and values that will eventually force political actors to recognise these rights through the political process. Thus, it paves a smooth way for state institutions to operate without having to destroy the entire edifice on

which the system of peace and cooperation is built. The American experience is a testament to the success of incremental development of rights and values. During the American constitution-making phase, there was an intense debate over the rights of the American citizens to legally own and trade slaves. The significance of this issue was such that, had the framers abolished slave trade during the negotiation process, they would have failed to negotiate the US Constitution as it stands now. Instead, the framers agreed to defer the question of slave trade till the year 1808 so the people of that era would deliberate on the provision of slave trade. Coming to the present, not only does the American Constitution not bear the scars of its illiberal past. By contrast, it has taken over the role as the flag bearer of freedom and equality throughout the world.

Decades of turmoil that have wreaked havoc on the people of Afghanistan have also engulfed the entire region into conflict. For an enduring Afghan peace settlement, it is imperative to maximise on the commonalities instead of conflating the issues that may potentially rupture the peace process. As Americans withdraw and the Taliban gain an edge in the negotiations, the Afghan government must adhere to the process of incremental development instead of ramming the Taliban with recognising liberal and progressive rights. It is a unique irony that the use of the proverbial haste makes waste candidly applies to the Afghan intra-peace dialogue. Though the diplomatic prelude between Pakistan, Taliban and the Afghan government sounds like an optimistic chapter yet, exorbitant compromises will have to be made for any party to go home victorious.

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# EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier arrives in London for face-to-face trade talks

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier has arrived in London for another round of Brexit talks with his UK counterpart David Frost.

Before he arrived in the British capital, he told a meeting of EU envoys: "We are not far from the take-it-or-leave-it moment."

He also tweeted the message, that the "same significant divergences persist."

In-person talks were paused last week after one of the EU's negotiating team tested positive for coronavirus, but they were set to resume in London on Saturday.

The window for an agreement on future trade relations is fast closing.

Failure to achieve one by January 1, when the UK's Brexit transition period ends, will have heavy economic consequences for both sides. Britain's chief negotiator Frost was similarly

cautious about the chances of a breakthrough. In a tweet, he wrote: "Some people are asking me why we are still talking. My answer is that it's my job to do my utmost to see if the conditions for a deal exist."

"It is late, but a deal is still possible, and I will continue to talk until it's clear that it isn't."

In London, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was up to the Europeans to make a move and claimed that Britain was prepared in the event that talks collapsed.

The "likelihood of a deal is very much determined by our friends and partners in the EU," he told reporters. Negotiations have been deadlocked for months over the issues of fishing rights, the governance of a deal, and the "level playing field" conditions aimed at preventing unfair competition by cutting standards or increasing state subsidies.



### A look at the world

#### Iran's Khamenei calls for action against scientist's killers

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has condemned the killing of the country's top nuclear scientist and called for action against the perpetrators.

In a statement on Saturday, Khamenei said all relevant authorities in Iran must "seriously place two crucial matters on their agendas" in the wake of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh's killing on Friday.

"First, investigating this crime and firmly prosecuting its perpetrators and its commanders," he said. "Second, continuing the martyr's scientific and technological efforts in all the sectors where he was active." Iran's leader referred to Fakhri-zadeh as one of "country's eminent scientists in the nuclear and defense fields" and said he had been



killed by "brutal mercenaries," an oblique reference to Israel.

Fakhri-zadeh was killed by unidentified gunmen on the outskirts of capital Tehran on Friday. The assailants first blew up a car ahead of him and then opened indiscriminate fire at his vehicle.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry said on Saturday that the security and intelligence agencies have found clues that could lead to the perpetrators.

While the identity of the assailants is still shrouded in mystery, top military and political officials in Iran have pointed fingers directly at Israel.

Revenge' awaits

Gen. Mohammad Baqeri, the chief of army staff, on Friday called the killing a "blow to Iran's defense industry" and said "hard revenge" awaits the top scientist's killers.

His words were echoed by many, including Gen. Hossein Dehghan, the top military adviser to the Supreme Leader, Gen. Hossein Salami, top commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, judiciary chief Ebrahim Raeesi, and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf.

President Hassan Rouhani also issued a statement on Saturday, condemning the killing and blaming Israel.

He said the killing will not affect the country's progress in the scientific arena, ... **P3**

#### Lukashenko says Belarusian KGB has proof of Poland's interference in Belarus' affairs



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko informed that the Belarusian security service KGB had provided him with reports claiming that Warsaw had meddled in Belarusian affairs, supporting the opposition.

According to BelTA news agency, the Belarusian leader visited Minsk City Clinical Hospital No. 6 on Friday. During the meeting, the Belarusian president read out the reports of the special services, which shine a light on the Western politicians' stance on the events in the republic and their plans for Minsk.

"These are the originals," the president said, cited by the agency. He quoted several Polish statesmen, namely Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who allegedly said: "The future of Belarus is of great importance for Poland. The western territories of Belarus historically belong to Poland... Warsaw has taken many concrete steps to help the Belarusian revolution: provided financial support through Polish and Polish-American programs of solidarity with the victims of the Lukashenko regime, invited Belarusian students, eased the border crossing rules, and provided support for independent media and NGOs."

Lukashenko added that Warsaw had carefully monitored the events in Belarus, aiming to create "an artificial crisis" in the country. "This conversation took place on 31 August: 'It is still early for the direct talks between the regime and the opposition. Lukashenko's regime is still too united, the army and KGB support him, and workers do not support any revolution at all. We need to wait and watch the situation unfold,'" Lukashenko quoted the Polish PM.

The Belarusian leader explained that he shared this information for people to understand his actions and for some individuals to evaluate their own activity.

Nationwide demonstrations have engulfed Belarus following the August 9 presidential election. According to the Central Election Commission's official results, incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko won ... **P2**

#### Mali: ICC establishes measures for victims in Mali

Rehabilitation measures for victims of crimes in central and northern Mali was announced Friday by the International Criminal Court (ICC) that includes medical treatment, psychological rehabilitation, including trauma counseling and material and livelihood support.

"Crimes under international law have multiplied in Mali in recent years, particularly in the center and north-east of the country. While waiting for justice to be done, we have decided to put in place measures to rehabilitate victims in these regions," said Mama Koite Doumbia, President of The Victims' Fund for Victims at the ICC that will implement the new program in partnership with organizations in Mali.



Doumbia said in a statement sent to Anadolu Agency that many victims are now in an extremely precarious situation and some have lost their possessions. "With this decision, we want to enable the survivors to move forward and thus contribute to the transitional justice process," she said.

Mayombo Kassongo, a lawyer for victims in the Al Mahdi case, said in the statement that "although they do not replace the judicial proceedings to which they are entitled, these new measures are very good news for victims in Mali, beyond the victims in Timbuktu."

Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi was found guilty of destroying historical and Islamic monuments in Timbuktu in 2012. He was sentenced to a nine-year prison sentence in 2017 and ordered to pay 2.7 euros (\$3.2 million) in reparations to the Timbuktu community.

Kassongo said the "decision is a glimmer of hope" for those affected by "the most serious crimes committed in Mali," especially "at a time when the victims of Al Mahdi are preparing to receive their first reparations." The ICC plans to carry out individual, collective and symbolic judicial reparations for communities in Timbuktu and internationally.

"The first measures are about to be implemented," the court said. "Protected buildings' destruction has caused suffering to people across Mali," the court said.



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