

# Damascus condemns US general's 'illegal' visit to 'illegal' military base

Syria's Foreign Ministry condemned a surprise visit by the United States' top military officer to an army base in the Kurdish-held northeast, dubbing it "illegal", state media reported. In his snap visit on Saturday, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley met US troops stationed in areas of war-torn Syria under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). About 900 US soldiers are deployed in several bases and posts across northeastern Syria on the pretext of fighting the Daesh terrorist group. Official news agency SANA on Sunday quoted a Foreign Ministry official as saying: "Syria strongly condemns the illegal visit of the American chairman of the chiefs of staff to an

illegal American military base in northeast Syria." Milley's visit was "a flagrant violation of the sovereignty and integrity" of Syrian territory, the official added, according to SANA, calling on "the US administration to immediately cease its systematic and continued violation of international law and support for separatist armed groups". Syrian government views the deployment of US forces in SDF-held territory as "occupation" and accuses US-aligned Kurdish forces of "separatist tendencies". Kurdish officials deny any separatist aspirations and say they seek to preserve their self-rule, which Damascus does not recognise. Milley's spokesman, Dave Butler, told the AFP news agency the US general "visited northeast Syria on



Saturday ... to meet with commanders and troops". It was Milley's first trip to Syria since assuming the

chairmanship in 2019. He visited the country before as an army chief, the spokesman said.

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley (L) speaks with forces at a US military base in northeast Syria during an unannounced visit on March 4, 2023.  
● PHIL STEWART/REUTERS

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Greece to seek EU rail funds as workers' strike grows



REUTERS – Greece will seek additional EU funding for urgent safety upgrades to the rail network, the government said on Monday, as public sector workers planned a widespread walk-out to protest the country's worst train crash that killed 57 people last week. Labour unions say the rail network has been severely weakened by cost-cutting and under-investment, a casualty of the debilitating debt crisis which afflicted Greece from 2010 to 2018.

### Estonia's PM Kallas wins reelection



AP – The center-right Reform Party of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas overwhelmingly won the Baltic country's general election, while a far-right challenger lost seats in a vote that focused on national security and the economy. Preliminary returns from a completed ballot count showed the Reform Party, the senior partner in the outgoing three-party coalition government, received 31.2% of the vote — the biggest share in Sunday's election. That translates into 37 seats at Estonia's 101-seat Parliament, or Riigikogu, an increase of three seats from the 2019 election.

### Israeli air force reservists protest over legal reforms

AFP – Dozens of Israeli air force pilots said they will boycott military training in protest at cabinet judicial reforms. In a letter sent to the chief of staff, 37 pilots threatened to not attend a training day due on Wednesday. Judicial reform is a cornerstone of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's administration, an alliance with ultra-Orthodox and extreme-right parties which took office in late December.

## Taliban's persecution of women could be 'crime against humanity': UN



The Taliban's treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan could amount to a crime against humanity, according to a U.N. report

presented on Monday at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Taliban seized power in August 2021, drastically

curtailing women's freedoms and rights, including their ability to attend high school and university, according to Reuters. In a report covering July to December 2022, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, found that the Taliban's treatment of women and girls "may amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity". "The Taliban's intentional and calculated policy is to repudiate the human rights of women and girls and to erase them from

public life," Bennett told the United Nations Human Rights Council. "It may amount to the international crime of gender persecution for which the authorities can be held accountable." A spokesperson for the Taliban-run information ministry did not immediately reply to a request for comment. The Taliban have in the past said they plan to open schools in future once they establish certain conditions for girls. Bennett said the Human Rights Council should send a strong message to

the Taliban that the "abysmal treatment of women and girls is intolerable and unjustifiable on any ground, including religion". "The cumulative effect of the restrictions on women and girls has a devastating, long-term impact on the whole population, and it is tantamount to gender apartheid," he said. In December, the Taliban banned most female aid workers, prompting many aid agencies to partially suspend operations in the midst of a humanitarian crisis unfolding during the cold winter months.

## South Korea to compensate victims of Japan's wartime forces labor



South Korea said on Monday that its companies would compensate people forced to work under Japan's 1910-1945 occupation of Korea, in a bid to improve poor relations that have impeded trade and cooperation between the two countries. The proposal was welcomed in Tokyo but faced immediate backlash from some victims and South Korea's main opposition party, who accused the government of capitulating to Japan, according to Reuters. Under the plan, South Korea would compensate former forced laborers through an existing public foundation funded by private-sector companies, Foreign Minister Park Jin told a briefing. "The soured South Korea-Japan relations should no longer be neglected, and we need to end the vicious cycle for the national interest, for the people," Park said. He said he hopes Japan responds sincerely, including by "implementing its previous public statements expressing remorse and apology." Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he welcomed the proposal and said he would work closely with Yoon. Relations plunged to their lowest point in decades after South Korea's Supreme Court in 2018 ordered Japanese firms to pay reparations to former forced laborers. Fifteen South Koreans have won such cases, but none has been compensated. Japan has maintained the compensation issue was settled under the 1965 treaty, and Hayashi said his government's stance had not changed. The row spilled over into a trade dispute, with Tokyo tightening curbs on exports to South Korea of high-tech materials used in smartphone displays and chips.

## Suicide bombing in SW Pakistan kills 10 policemen

A suicide bomber riding on a motorcycle rammed into a police truck in Pakistan's restive southwest, killing at least 10 policemen and wounding 12 officers in one of the deadliest attacks on security forces in recent months, authorities said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, which took place on a bridge in the district of Sibi in Baluchistan Province, but separatists and local militants have been blamed for previous such attacks, AP reported. Mahmood Notenzai, a local police chief, said the officers were on a routine patrol when the attack happened, initially killing nine. The casualties were taken to a nearby hospital, where one of the critically wounded policemen later died, he added. Sibi is about 150 kilometers (90 miles) east of Quetta, the provincial capital. The force of the blast overturned the truck, which caused additional injuries, he said. Trucks often transport troops in Pakistan. Notenzai said the officers who came under attack were deployed last week to Sibi, where an annual cultural festival was held amid tight security. Last year, a suicide bomber from the Daesh terrorist group targeted President Arif Alvi's security convoy when he attended the Sibi festival. Alvi was far away from the site of the bombing, which killed five troops. The festival has been celebrated for several centuries to mark the advent of summer. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif condemned the attack. In a statement, he expressed his condolences to the families of those killed. He said the attack was part of nefarious enemy plans to destabilize Pakistan and vowed to defeat terrorism.



● BALUCHISTAN POLICE