

## UN: Qur'an-burnings aimed at dividing communities

The United Nations said hate speech was on the rise everywhere, as the UN Human Rights Council held an urgent debate Tuesday to address recent desecration of Muslims' holy book, Qur'an, in Sweden.

These appear tailor-made to inflame anger and divide communities, the UN human rights chief Volker Turk said as he opened the debate at the UN's top rights body in Geneva, AFP reported.

A copy of Qur'an was burnt outside the Swedish capital's main mosque on June 28, triggering a diplomatic backlash across the Muslim world.

Pakistan and other nations called for a discussion of "the alarming rise in premeditated and public acts of religious hatred as manifested by recurrent desecration of the Holy Qur'an in some European and other countries."

Turk said recent Qur'an-burning incidents "appear to have been manufactured to express contempt and inflame anger; to drive wedges between people; and to provoke, transforming differences of perspective into hatred and, perhaps, violence".

He said that irrespective of the law or personal belief, "people need to act with respect for others".

He said hate speech needed to be combated through dialogue, education, raising awareness and inter-faith engagement.

"Powered by the tidal forces of social media, and in a context of increasing international and national discord and polarisation, hate speech of every kind is rising, everywhere," Turk said.

"It is harmful to individuals, and it damages the social cohesion necessary to the sound functioning of all societies." Salwan Momika, 37, who fled from Iraq to Sweden several years ago, stomped on the Muslim holy book and set several pages alight in Stockholm. The Swedish government condemned the Qur'an burning as "Islamophobic", but added that Sweden had a "constitutionally-protected right to freedom of assembly, expression and demonstration".



Iraqis lift copies of Qur'an during a rally in Basra on July 2, 2023, amid protests against a desecration of the Muslims' holy book outside a Stockholm mosque that outraged Muslims around the world.

● HUSSEIN FALEH/AFP

## Turkey gives green light to Swedish NATO membership bid

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday agreed to forward to parliament Sweden's bid to join the NATO military alliance, appearing to end months of drama over an issue that had strained the bloc as war has raged in Ukraine.

Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership last year, abandoning their policies of military non-alignment that had lasted through the decades of the Cold War in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, Reuters reported.

While Finland's NATO membership was green-lighted in April, Turkey and Hungary have yet to clear Sweden's bid. Stockholm has been working to join the bloc at the alliance's summit in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, which begins on Tuesday.

"I'm glad to announce ... that President Erdogan has agreed to forward the accession protocol for Sweden to the grand national assembly as soon as possible, and work closely with the assembly to ensure ratification," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference, describing it as a "historic" step. He had convened Erdogan and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson for several hours of talks on the eve of the summit as he sought to finally break the deadlock.

Erdogan has held out for months, saying Sweden's accession hinged on the implementation of a deal reached last year during the alliance's summit in Madrid and that no one should expect compromises from Ankara.

Turkey has accused Sweden of not doing enough against people Turkey sees as terrorists, mainly members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the EU and the United States.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reacted to the Turkey's decision, saying that Turkey should be under no illusion that it might one day be allowed to join the European Union.



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (top-C), Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (R) react during a meeting, on the eve of a NATO summit, in Vilnius, Lithuania, on July 10, 2023.

● YVES HERMAN/POOL/AFP

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Protests erupt after Israel reform clause voted through



AFP - Protests erupted across Israel Tuesday, hours after parliament adopted in a first reading a key clause of the cabinet's judicial overhaul package. The cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu forged ahead with the controversial move despite mass demonstrations since the reforms were proposed in January.

#### Baku accuses Red Cross of smuggling, shuts road to Karabakh

AL JAZEERA - Azerbaijan has temporarily shut the only road linking its breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia, accusing the Armenian branch of the Red Cross of smuggling.

The Armenian-populated region has been at the centre of a decades-long territorial dispute between the Caucasus arch-foes, which have fought several wars over the mountainous territory.

"The passage through Lachin checkpoint of the state border is temporarily suspended" pending an investigation into the Red Cross using its medical vehicles for "smuggling", Azerbaijan's state border service said on Tuesday.

#### Top commander warns ...

Lauding the IRGC's Ground Force for "effective missile and drone attacks" against the terrorist groups in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, with the purpose of protecting Iran's security, Major General Baqeri said the strikes have been suspended after the Baghdad government undertook to disarm those groups and stop their activities.

The general then noted that Iran will wait until September and hopes that the government of Iraq would honor its commitments, adding, "If the deadline passes and they [terrorists] remain armed or carry out any operation, our operations against those groups will definitely recur more severely."

Iran launched several rounds of military strikes on the positions of separatist groups in Iraq's Kurdistan Region in 2022.

## NATO summit unlikely to ease tensions in Ukraine

By Ebrahim Beheshti  
Staff Writer

### INTERVIEW

The NATO leaders' summit is currently underway in Lithuania, taking place on Tuesday and Wednesday. Prior to his arrival in Lithuania, US President Joe Biden engaged in discussions with the Prime Minister and the King of the host country, in Britain. Ukraine, amidst its ongoing war with Russia, holds aspirations of greater NATO assistance. However, Biden made it clear that Kiev's accession to NATO is presently unattainable. To shed light on the significance of this meeting and its implications for the war, we sought the insights of Amir-Ali Abolfath, an expert in American affairs.

Iran Daily: Biden is currently in Lithuania to participate in the NATO meeting. During his visit to Britain, he stated that Ukraine's inclusion in NATO is not a viable option until the ongoing war comes to

an end. Conversely, the Ukrainian government is seeking greater support from Western nations. Do you observe any indications of a potential resolution to the conflict and the establishment of peace?

Abolfath: Presently, the prevailing indicators do not suggest a path toward peace. The war has acquired symbolic significance for both Russia and the United States as the leader of the Western world, and neither party wishes to emerge as the loser in this conflict. Moscow perceives that refraining from battling in the Donbass region would necessitate a confrontation with Western powers on Russian soil. Therefore, it has paid substantial financial, military, and reputational costs. Likewise, America believes that if Moscow emerges victorious, the international order established by the United States after World War II would collapse. Consequently, tensions have escalated significantly. It appears that we are likely to witness a protracted

war of attrition in Ukraine. Some even speculate that the outcome of the Korean War will be echoed here. Several decades have passed since North Korea and South Korea reached a truce, yet they have not achieved a lasting peace. In Ukraine, we may anticipate a similar scenario — a temporary cease-fire rather than a comprehensive resolution — in the immediate future.

Recently, the United States dispatched weapon shipments, including cluster bombs, to Ukraine — a move that has garnered significant criticism. This measure is bound to provoke a response from Russia and is expected to bring more death and destruction. Is there a possibility that the fears of everyone regarding a nuclear war might occur?

If Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia fails and the Western aid does not tip the balance of power in favor of Kiev, we can anticipate a surge in weapon supplies from Western nations to

Ukraine. Consequently, we will witness the utilization of even more destructive weaponry in the ongoing conflict, as both sides continue to use more destructive weapons.

However, the question of whether we are on the brink of a nuclear war remains. While the likelihood of a full-fledged nuclear conflict is remote, it is not solely limited to the scenario where one side of a conflict intentionally deploys an atomic bomb and provokes a retaliatory response from the opposing side.

Ukraine, in particular, possesses nuclear power plants. In the early stages of the war, a missile struck just 400 meters away from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. At that time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed that if the missile had landed a mere 400 meters closer, Ukraine's history would have come to an end.

Hence, there exists a legitimate concern that the war could inadvertently reach these nuclear facilities, potentially leading to an event of far greater destructive



magnitude than the notorious Chernobyl disaster.

Based on this context, what impact will the NATO meeting have on the conflict in Ukraine?

As highlighted by Biden during his visit to Britain, the realization of Ukraine's NATO membership appears unlikely in the near future. Nonetheless, NATO remains committed to providing diverse forms of assistance to Ukraine and may even escalate both the quantity and quality of this support. The United States' allies within NATO have little choice but to comply with such efforts. In response to the criticism surrounding the US shipment of cluster bombs to Ukraine, a senior German

official stated that the decision has been made and others should not oppose. This statement implies that the United States, as the leading force, has made a decision, and the other member nations are expected to follow suit. Europe finds itself aligning with America in the overarching Moscow-Washington conflict, which has propelled NATO into a role where it cannot unravel the complex knots of the ongoing war through its meeting.

While NATO continues to provide aid, there is an acknowledgment that Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia, which has persisted for over 70 days, has yet to achieve significant success.