

Armenia calls for UN help on Nagorno-Karabakh



A bridge and a checkpoint are seen on a road towards the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, in Armenia, on July 28, 2023.
● HAYK MANUKIAN/PHOTOLURE VIA AP

Armenia on Saturday urged the UN Security Council to hold a crisis meeting on Nagorno-Karabakh, citing a "deteriorating humanitarian situation" after accusing Azerbaijan of blocking supplies to the disputed region. The Caucasus neighbours have been locked in a dispute over the enclave – internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan – since the 1980s and fought

two wars over the territory, AFP reported. The second, in 2020, saw the defeat of Armenian forces and significant territorial gains for Azerbaijan. "The Armenian government demands the intervention of the UN Security Council as the main organ for safeguarding global security," Mher Margaryan, Armenia's permanent representative to the UN, said in a letter to the body. For months, Yerevan has accused Baku of stopping traffic through the Lachin corridor – a short, mountainous road linking Armenia to Armenian-populated settlements in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. In his letter, Margaryan referred to "serious shortages" of food, medicine and fuel in the majority Armenian-populated region of Azerbaijan and cuts in electricity and gas supplies. "This situation has led to rising mortality due to several illnesses," said Margaryan, citing patients suffering from conditions including diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. "The population of Nagorno-Karabakh today stands on the edge of a veritable humanitarian catastrophe," he warned, accusing Azerbaijan of "deliberately creating unbearable living conditions for the population." That, he wrote, amounted to an "atrocious" design to force them from their homes. Armenia and international aid groups have meanwhile been warning that the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is dire and deteriorating, with shortages of food, medicines and energy. The two neighbours have been unable to reach a lasting peace settlement despite mediation efforts by the European Union, United States and Russia.

W African regional group weighs next steps on Niger

West African leaders were weighing their next moves on Saturday as they seek to overturn a military coup in Niger that has rocked the region but also triggered a groundswell of support in the country.

Niger's military last month imprisoned President Mohamed Bazoum and assumed power, drawing condemnation from international powers and raising the spectre of further conflict in the impoverished Sahel region of West Africa which is already overrun by a deadly insurgency, Reuters reported.

The regional bloc ECOWAS on Thursday decided to activate a task force drawing on troops from across the region for a possible military intervention to undo what was the seventh coup in West and Central Africa in three years. At stake is not just the fate of Niger – a major uranium producer and key Western ally in the fight against the Islamists – but also the concerns of global powers with key strategic interests in the semi-desert zone.

Thousands of people gathered in Niger's capital on Friday to demonstrate in favour of the coup. The rally began at a French military base in the capital Niamey, then protesters with signs and flags spread onto surrounding streets. "Long live Russia," one protester's sign read. "Down with France... Down with ECOWAS," referring to the Economic Community of West African States.

Regional army chiefs were set to meet in the coming days. It was not yet clear how long the ECOWAS force would take to assemble, how big it would be and if it would actually invade. The organisation stressed that all options were on the table and it hoped for a peaceful resolution. Security analysts said the force could take weeks to set up, potentially leaving room for negotiations. Meanwhile, the African Union, the EU, the US and the UN all said they were increasingly worried about Bazoum's detention conditions.

The UN Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk on Friday said the conditions were "rapidly deteriorating" and could amount to a violation of international human rights law.



Niger's junta supporters take part in a demonstration in front of a French army base in Niamey, Niger, August 11, 2023.
● MAHAMADOU HAMIDOU/REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pakistan picks caretaker PM

AFP – Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, a little-known senator from Pakistan's least-populous province, will be caretaker prime minister to see the country through to the next election, the leader of the opposition said Saturday. "We first agreed that whoever should be prime minister, he should be from a smaller province so smaller provinces' grievances should be addressed," said Raja Riaz Ahmad after a meeting with outgoing premier Shehbaz Sharif. Pakistan's parliament was dissolved on Wednesday and by law an election should be held within 90 days, but the results of the latest census released last week means more time will likely be needed to redraw constituencies.

Biden's remark on China downplayed



BLOOMBERG – The White House pushed back on suggestions that President Joe Biden is toughening his rhetoric on China, a day after he called the world's second-largest economy a "ticking time bomb," saying the remarks were consistent with US criticisms of Beijing.

"The president is referring to the domestic challenges that China has at home, and some of those are on the economic front. And some of those are on the social and cultural front," US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters. Kirby said he wanted to counter the idea that the US had "sharpened our language."

Hawaii fire death toll hits 80



● REUTERS

AFP – The death toll from wildfires that destroyed swathes of Hawaii this week has risen to 80, Maui county officials said Friday. "The number of fatalities is at 80," the county said in a regular update, adding that 1,418 people were at emergency evacuation shelters.

Russia downs 20 drones over Crimea following spate of attacks on Moscow

Russia thwarted an attack by 20 Ukrainian drones targeting Crimea overnight, the Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday. Fourteen drones were shot down by Russian air defenses and a further six were jammed electronically, the ministry said in a Telegram post, AP reported. No casualties or damage were reported. Kyiv officials neither confirmed nor denied Ukraine's involvement in the attacks. Crimea was reunited with Russia in 2014. As videos circulated on Russian social media Saturday appearing to show smoke rising above a bridge linking Russia to Crimea, the peninsula's



Police and emergency vehicles parked at the side of the wreckage of the drone fell near the Karamyshevskaya embankment to the after a reported drone attack in Moscow, Russia, on Aug. 11, 2023.
● AP

Moscow-appointed governor, Sergei Aksyonov, reported that Russian air defense had also prevented an attack there by shooting

down two Ukrainian missiles. The bridge was not damaged, he said, although traffic was briefly halted.

An adviser to Aksyonov, Oleg Kryuchkov, claimed that "a smoke screen was put up by special services." In Moscow, officials said Friday they had destroyed a drone aimed at the capital, the latest in a string of attacks on the city in recent days. A Ukrainian drone was destroyed over the western outskirts of Moscow, Defence Ministry said, adding there were no casualties or damage as a result of the incident. In July, Ukrainian drone strikes on Crimea blew up an ammunition depot and damaged the bridge across the Kerch Strait linking the peninsula to Russia's mainland. In Ukraine, Russian attacks

on Saturday killed a policeman and injured 12 other people in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

A man was also killed in the Kharkiv region, according to local authorities. Three drones were destroyed over Zaporizhzhia, and a missile attack targeted Kryvyi Rig, the hometown of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, according to Governor Sergiy Lysak.

Also Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the firing of all the heads of regional conscription centers, part of his crackdown on corruption since the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine more than 17

months ago.

The step was taken after Ukrainian security services presented details of 112 criminal cases against draft board officials suspected of taking bribes and engaging in corrupt practices. Zelensky said in a Telegram post that the jobs should instead go to war veterans, including those with injuries. Zelensky previously fired senior officials suspected of corruption. That has sent a signal to Western allies providing Kyiv with tens of billions of dollars in military aid that Ukraine is serious about clamping down on graft, which has long plagued the country's military.

Australia PM condemns 'scare' tactics on Indigenous reform

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Saturday attacked an opposition "scare campaign" against his plan to give Indigenous people a constitutional right to be consulted on laws that impact them. Opinion polls show faltering support for the reform, which was proposed by Indigenous communities to

give them a so-called Voice on policymaking as well as recognition in the constitution for the first time, AFP reported. Australians will vote on it in a referendum expected in mid-October. An Essential survey of 1,150 voters released last week put the "no" camp ahead for the first time with 47 per-

cent against, 43 percent in favour and 10 percent undecided. Other recent surveys indicated the "yes" side was slightly ahead despite a gradual decline over the past year. To pass, the constitutional amendment needs a majority of votes in favour, both nationally and in most

states. Albanese said the conservative opposition Liberal Party had been "running a scare campaign about the Voice". Opposition leader Peter Dutton has warned that putting the Voice in the constitution would "change our whole system of government". But he has vowed to simply

recognise Indigenous people in the constitution if he wins government. Supporters say the constitutional reform enshrining a Voice would help address the colonial legacy and inequalities faced by Aboriginal Australians, whose ancestors have lived on the continent for at least 60,000 years.

More than 200 years since British settlement and the ensuing persecution of Indigenous Australians, they are more likely to be poor, undereducated, sick or jailed. But opponents say the proposal is divisive, lacks detail, adds unnecessary bureaucracy and risks clogging up the courts.