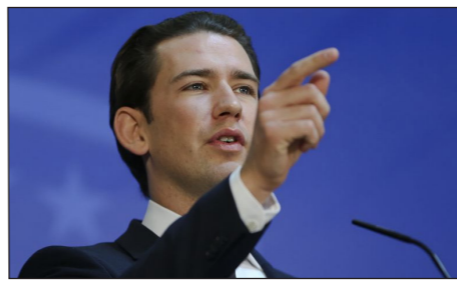


Austria: Kosovo-Serbia Deal Is Basis for Joining EU

PRISTINA, Kosovo — Austria's chancellor told Kosovo on Tuesday that any step toward joining the European Union must be based on dialogue with Serbia. Sebastian Kurz, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said during his visit to Pristina that without a peaceful agreement between Pristina and Belgrade there would be no peaceful coexistence and regional stabil-

ity. "A peaceful agreement between Pristina and Belgrade is the basis ... for EU membership and a guarantee to achieve security, stability, peace, economic growth and well-being," Kurz said at a news conference with his host, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci. Kurz arrived from Belgrade, where he also warned that membership in the bloc depends on resolution of



the Kosovo issue. Kosovo and Serbia have been negotiating for more than seven years to join the EU. (AP)

EU Extends Venezuela Sanctions over Democracy, Rights Violations

BRUSSELS - The European Union on Tuesday extended sanctions against Venezuela until November 2019 for what it said were human rights violations and undermining of democracy and the rule of law under President Nicolas Maduro. The bloc has an embargo against Venezuela on the sales of arms and "equipment for internal re-

pression", a travel ban and an asset freeze on 18 Venezuelan officials in place. This is in response to accusations of rights abuses by state security officials during anti-government protests in January, and a May presidential election that gave Maduro a second term but was widely dismissed as a sham. (Reuters)

(1) NATO Secretary...

praised the Afghan forces for bravery and loyalty, and called on the Taliban and other insurgent groups to "stop killing their fellow Afghans". He added: "the Taliban must understand that continuing the fight is pointless and counter-productive. To be part of Afghanistan's future, they must sit down at the negotiating table."

The Secretary General further stressed the need for an inclusive Afghan-owned and led peace process, saying: "the potential for peace is greater now than it has been in many years". He added that "we count on the government to meet its commitments for good governance, the rule of law, fighting corruption and protecting the rights of all - especially women."

Later in the day, the Secretary General and his delegation are attending a ministerial meeting chaired by National Security Advisor Dr Hamdullah Mohib. The Secretary General's delegation are also meeting with the Commander of the Resolute Support Mission, General Austin Miller, and with NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann, as well as with Allied ambassadors, and with representatives of the European Union and United Nations. Later on Tuesday, the Secretary General, Air Marshal Sir Stuart, and General Scaparrotti will also meet with representatives of Afghan civil society. (NATO)

(2) 40 Civilians...

The Taliban also engaged in the fight later.

The Taliban in separate statements said that Hakim Shujai, a pro-government commander, was injured and a number of his illegal armed men killed in the clashes.

Kundulan and Hussaini villages of Khas Uruzgan district share border with Malistan district of Ghazni province.

The government delegation headed by presidential advisor Asadullah Falah has been sent to the two districts for investigation by President Ashraf Ghani.

The delegation comprises representatives of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, National Directorate of Security (NDS), Attorney General Office (AGO), and Administrative Office of the President.

The delegation visited both Khas Uruzgan and Malistan districts and discussed the issue with local officials on Monday.

Asadullah Falah, head of the delegation, while visiting Malistan district, told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had started a comprehensive investigation of the incident.

He said they met with security, civil officials and local elders in Khas Uruzgan district and in Malistan district.

He said the battle was not a tribal conflict but a fight between Taliban, government forces and pro-government armed men.

The Taliban attacked residential buildings and villages and caused casualties to civilians, he said, adding around 500 families had been displaced as a result of the conflict. Falah added 40 civilians including

women and children had been killed in the fight. However, he did not say who caused the civilian casualties. He said the delegation would be in the area until they completed their investigation.

Imam Zaman, Malistan district chief, also said the battle was not a tribal issue but the Taliban assaulted local people and government forces. After Khas Uruzgan, the Taliban launched attacks on Sher Dagh village of Malistan district and killed 11 soldiers and scores of civilians, he added. More than 2,000 families were displaced as result of the battle. Khadim Ali, a Hazara and resident of Malistan district, told Pajhwok that they had been living together with Pashtuns for long years and developed close relations and businesses with them. He said the clash was not a sectarian violence but a Taliban's assault on the people. (Pajhwok)

(3) First Lady...

in Montreal, Canada Monday afternoon.

She downplayed an attack that killed 15 and marred the recent election in Afghanistan. She described it as an unfortunate but relatively minor incident that came at the end of the day and otherwise did not disrupt the vote.

She is working to train women in conflict resolution. "We need to get out of the mentality of war," she said, noting that people live differently and more violently after decades of conflict.

"You lose your sense of right and wrong. You're in survival mode," she said, adding that while skills of negotiation and compromise are not new to Afghanistan the have been "forgotten after a period of war."

She said she is "very optimistic" about Afghanistan's prospects for peace. After a recent three-day ceasefire in the country, she said that members of Taliban came into the city to find ice cream and that Afghans were "very happy." Though short-lived, she said the incident proved naysayers wrong.

She is sure a more lasting peace for the country will be reached. "I don't know if I will live to see it, but it will happen...peace takes a long time."

She said the misconceptions are "created by international aid organizations that need to raise funds." Commenting that such organizations are run quite sloppily, she suggested that to keep their funds coming they exaggerate the plight of Afghan women.

She said that while the women of her country need help, they are extremely resilient and resourceful with very little money. She says their position in the country has improved vastly in the past decade and a half and that they are often hurt by their misrepresentation in international conversations. She said that changing that narrative will help "unleash their power." (Pajhwok)

(4) Record Level...

centres also took place in the months before the election, some claimed by Islamic State.

The United Nations said attacks by anti-government elements, mostly the Taliban, were carried out with rockets, grenades and mortars as

well as improvised explosive devices.

The United Nations also pointed to a campaign of threats, intimidation and harassment, including abductions before the election.

"The Taliban's actions forced many ordinary Afghans to choose between exercising their right to participate in the political process and risking their own safety," the United Nations said.

The results of the parliamentary election are still being tallied.

A more important presidential election will be held on April 20. (Reuters)

(5) Ghani Formally...

increase the volume of exports. "It was a great honor to see Afghanistan's pine nut exports to China today, Chinese consumers have been enjoying valuable goods from Afghanistan, and we expect more exports from this country in the future," said Wang Daxue, the deputy ambassador of China to Afghanistan during the opening ceremony of the air corridor between the two countries.

According to the statement so far through air corridors 100 cargo flights had been conducted and more than 260, 0 tonnes of Afghan products worth \$51 million had been exported. (Pajhwok)

(6) US Official in...

Pakistan of harboring militant groups that carry out attacks in Afghanistan. Pakistan denies the charge and says it is ready to help resolve the 17-year-long war next door. (AP)

(7) Two Thousand Empty...

The traders and drivers said they have rented the containers from Karachi and other ports and it costs them thousands of dollars every day if they are not allowed back into Pakistan.

"One month has passed. We have to pay the salary of the driver and cleaner. From where should we find this money and to whom should we complain," Zamarak, a trader said.

Border police at Torkham Gate did not comment on the issue, but the interior ministry said they have started an investigation into the issue.

"We will assess the issue to find out whether it has been ordered by the finance ministry or if police are doing it," the interior ministry's spokesman Najib Danish said.

Meanwhile, a number of traders said in a voice message sent to TOLOnews that now some people at Torkham Gate have let container trucks through in exchange for money. (Tolo news)

(8) National Dialogue...

the Islamic Republic of Iran for its attempts and support for accelerating the peace process in Afghanistan and expect the country not to cut its support," he added. (Tolo news)

(9) Two Heroin...

The Interior Ministry has not disclosed further information regarding the detained individuals in its statement. (KP)

(10) Taliban Attack...

the whereabouts of the remaining soldiers," the officer said.

The Taliban, fighting to oust foreign forces and overthrow the Western-backed Kabul government, claimed responsibility saying they had captured the base, killed 30 soldiers and seized weapons and ammunition.

Some officials in Farah have accused Iran, which the United States says is trying to extend its influence in western Afghanistan, of providing the insurgents with money and weapons. Iran denies the accusation. The attack underlined the struggle Afghan security forces face in confronting the insurgents, who have steadily extended their control in the countryside, even though the government holds all provincial centers. On Monday, the militants captured an important security post outside the central city of Ghazni, killing 13 members of government forces and underscoring their vulnerability even in areas where defenses have been bolstered.

More than 17 years after U.S.-led forces toppled the Taliban regime, Afghan forces are dying in record numbers with Afghan and U.S. officials warning that the casualty rate is not sustainable.

In September alone, more than 500 Afghan soldiers were killed and hundreds wounded, the Defence Ministry said.

Tentative steps toward peace talks between the Taliban and the United States have had no impact on the level of attacks.

The U.S. special envoy for peace in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, met Taliban leaders in Qatar last month. The Taliban will also join multilateral peace talks hosted by Russia this week. (Reuters)

(11) Taliban Tax Collectors...

regarding implementation of their rules and regulations, I think they raise more from tax collection than the Afghan government," said Mohammaddin, a resident of the district outside Kunduz city, which is largely under Taliban control despite repeated operations by government forces to try to push the insurgents back. "They have proper tax collection and people cannot disobey them in areas they control."

How much of Afghanistan is under effective Taliban control is disputed, but there is little doubt it has been growing and the insurgents are increasing their presence in the everyday lives of millions of ordinary Afghans such as Mohammaddin.

According to data from the NATO-led Resolute Support mission published last week, the government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has control or influence over 65 percent of the population but only 55.5 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts, less than at any time since the Taliban was driven from power in 2001. The Taliban says it controls 70 percent of the country.

As the insurgents have won ground, levies on land and day-to-day economic activities have added to funds raised from illegal mining and the drug trade, allowing the Taliban to bolster its credentials as a government-in-waiting.

"The Taliban have the power to just easily extort however much they want but that's not quite what they do. They try to look and behave like a state," said Ashley Jackson, author

of "Life Under the Taliban Shadow Government", a study published this year by the British-based Overseas Development Institute.

The Taliban has tended to take over two traditional Islamic levies: zakat, an obligation on Muslims to donate 2.5 percent of their income to the poor; and ushur, a 10 percent tax on harvests or produce taken to market. In addition, electricity and mobile phone bills, which the insurgents collect in return for leaving power pylons and phone masts alone, and small levies on businesses selling daily necessities such as bakeries or flour mills, weave Taliban authority firmly into everyday life.

Wahid Tawhidi, a spokesman for Breshna Sherkat said the group estimated it lost around 5 million afghani (\$66,500) a year from payments diverted to the Taliban, particularly in the provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Helmand and Kandahar. But it considered itself a national power provider that had a duty to ensure equal service to all parts of the country, he said.

Ahmad, 37, who lives in the Taliban-controlled district of Dasht-e Archi, outside Kunduz, but owns a grocery shop in the city, which is under government control, says he pays 5 afghani (7 cents) per box of items in his shop, a total of around 600-700 afghani a month.

"I don't know what they call it, but I pay," he said. (Reuters)

(12) Nearly \$300k...

two tours in Afghanistan and Iraq prior to his most recent deployment. He was killed in an "insider attack" by a member of the ANSF, the National Guard confirmed on Sunday.

Another U.S. soldier was injured in the attack. The attacker was killed by other Afghan security forces.

"Brent typified the citizen soldier who served so diligently in his community as well as felt this call to wear a uniform and serve where ever the nation needed him to go," said leader of the Utah National Guard Maj. Gen. Jefferson Burton.

He was expected to return to his mayoral position in January.

A GoFundMe page was launched Sunday with more than \$292,000 raised.

Utah was in mourning following the news of Taylor's death, and many prominent figures offered their condolences.

"I am heartbroken at the loss of Major Brent Taylor. Our deepest condolences and constant prayers are with his wife Jennie, his children and the entire Taylor family. All of Utah mourns with you," Utah Governor Gary Herbert said on Twitter.

"Heartbroken with the tragic news of Major Brent Taylor's death by gunfire in Afghanistan," Utah Senator candidate Mitt Romney also said on the microblogging site. "Another unmeasurable price is paid for freedom."

Taylor is survived by his wife and seven children. His body is scheduled to arrive in the U.S. later Monday. "As one of many, many military families to give the ultimate sacrifice we also want to express our love for this great nation and the pride that we feel knowing that Brent gave his life in service to his country," Taylor's family said in a statement. (AA)