



US orders diplomats out of Myanmar as violence spirals

Homeless but not forgotten in Britain's COVID job drive

Page 6

Page 7



NIAMEY: Picture shows a fire in a street and projectiles on the ground as Niger's opposition supporters protest after the announcement of the results of the country's presidential run-off in Niamey. —AFP

Niger troops foil 'attempted coup'

Soldiers behind putsch arrested, two days before presidential inauguration

NIAMEY: Elite troops in Niger thwarted an "attempted coup" early yesterday, a security source said, just two days before the historic inauguration of Mohamed Bazoum as president of the chronically unstable Sahel nation. Residents earlier reported hearing gunfire in the middle of the night near the presidency in the capital Niamey. "There were some arrests among a few members of the army who are behind this attempted coup," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The Presidential Guard retaliated, preventing this group of soldiers from approaching the presidential palace," the source said. A resident of Niamey's Plateau district, which includes the president's official residence and offices, told AFP: "It was around 3 am, we heard shots from heavy and light weapons and it lasted 15 minutes before stopping, followed by shots from light weapons." "The gunfire lasted about 20 minutes," another resident said. A third resident spoke of "intense shooting, with heavy and light weapons".

Online newspaper actuniger.com reported that calm had returned by around 4 am. In short video clips posted on social networks, only several seconds in length, sporadic bursts of gunfire could be heard

in the pitch dark. It was not immediately possible to verify the videos independently. The US embassy said it was suspending consular services until further notice and advised its employees not to come to work, and the French embassy similarly urged French nationals to stay at home.

The alleged coup comes ahead of Bazoum's inauguration on Friday—the first elected transition in Niger's history since independence from France in 1960. Bazoum is a former interior minister and right-hand man of outgoing president Mahamadou Issoufou, who is voluntarily stepping down after two five-year terms, a move that has been warmly praised by France and others. Bazoum's victory in the second round of elections on February 2 was confirmed by the constitutional court this month. The runner-up, former president Mahamane Ousmane, contested the results, claiming that he was the real winner. Ousmane had called for "peaceful marches" across the country, but authorities banned a planned opposition protest yesterday in Niamey the day before.

Troubled nation

Niger is the poorest country in the world, accord-

ing to the benchmark of the UN's 189-nation Human Development Index (HDI). It has suffered four coups in its history, most recently a February 2010 putsch which toppled then president Mamadou Tandja. The Sahel country has also been struck by repeated jihadist attacks, from insurgents who have advanced from Mali in the west and Nigeria in the southeast. More than 300 people have been killed in three attacks in the west since the start of the year.

In the most recent of these, 141 members of the Tuareg community were massacred on March 21 in Tahoua, a vast desert region abutting Mali. Bazoum has ruled out any talks with the insurgents. Niger's armed forces are poorly equipped and trained, and number just 25,000 in a country twice the size of Texas.

The plan is to double this to 50,000 men within five years, but funding is key. Last year, violent protests broke out over a military procurement scandal officially estimated to have cost nearly 32.6 billion CFA francs (49.7 million euros/\$55.1 million). On March 8, Issoufou, the outgoing president, was awarded the coveted Ibrahim Prize-Africa's top prize for leadership. —AFP

The Geneva-based organization's annual report tracks disparities between the sexes in 156 countries across four areas: education, health, economic opportunity and political empowerment.

Workplace equality in 267 years

On the plus side, women appear to be gradually closing the gender gap in areas such as health and education. But inequality in the workplace—which has long appeared to be the stickiest area to fix—is still not expected to be erased for another 267.6 years.

And the pandemic has not helped. The WEF pointed to a study by the UN's International Labor Organization showing that women were more likely to lose their jobs in the crisis, in part because they are disproportionately represented in sectors directly disrupted by lockdowns. Surveys by pollsters Ipsos have meanwhile shown that women were carrying a greater share of the burden of increased housework and childcare during lockdowns.

"We find that women around the world are now spending (the equivalent of) a full-time job doing childcare," Ipsos chief operating officer Natalie Lacey told yesterday's press conference.

"This has taken its toll. The level of stress that women are feeling is higher than men," she said. Women were also being hired back at a slower rate than men as workplaces opened up again, according to LinkedIn data referenced in the report. "It has been a very tough year for working women," LinkedIn vice president Sue Duke told the press conference. At the start of the pandemic, women "saw a real dip in hiring... (and this) is recovering slower than male hiring," she said, lamenting especially a "marked decline in the hiring of women to leadership roles."

Yesterday's report also highlighted the severe under-representation of women in the ballooning tech sector. "If



we want a dynamic future economy, it is vital for women to be represented in the jobs of tomorrow," Zahidi said.

Political gender gap growing

It was in the political sphere that the march towards gender parity did the biggest about-face, with several large-population countries seeing the political gender gap widen, the WEF study found. Women still hold just over a quarter of parliamentary seats worldwide, and only 22.6 percent of ministerial positions.

On its current trajectory, the political gender gap is not expected to close completely for another 145.5 years, the report found. That marks a 50-percent hike from the estimated 95 years in the 2020 report, released at the end of 2019. WEF pointed out. Progress across the categories varies greatly in different countries and regions. The report pointed out that while Western European countries could close their overall gender gap in 52.1 years, countries in the Middle East and North Africa will take nearly 142.4 years to do so. —AFP

BBC reporter leaves China, says 'too risky to carry on'

BEIJING: A senior BBC correspondent said yesterday he had left China, after facing legal threats and pressure from authorities over his reporting on Xinjiang rights abuses and the coronavirus pandemic. John Sudworth told BBC Radio 4 in an interview that he had relocated to Taiwan after nine years in Beijing as it was "too risky to carry on". Threats from Chinese authorities had "intensified" in recent months, he added.

At least 18 foreign correspondents were expelled by China last year, during a tit-for-tat row with the US that decimated the international press presence in the country. Press freedom groups say the space for foreign reporters to operate in China is increasingly tightly-controlled, with journalists followed on the streets, suffering harassment online and refused visas. "The BBC has faced a full-on propaganda attack not just aimed at the organization itself but at me personally across multiple Communist Party-controlled platforms," said Sudworth, who will continue to work as China correspondent from Taiwan.

"We face threats of legal action, as well as massive surveillance now, obstruction and intimidation, whenever and wherever we try to film," he added, reporting that he had even been "followed by plainclothes police" during his departure from China. In recent weeks, Chinese state media and officials have repeatedly attacked Sudworth for his reporting on alleged forced labor practices targeting Uyghur Muslim minorities in Xinjiang's cotton industry in particular.

The BBC also confirmed Sudworth's relocation after state media tabloid Global Times reported yesterday he was "hiding" in Taiwan. "John's work has exposed truths the Chinese authorities did not want the world to know," the broadcaster said in a statement on Twitter. Xinjiang authorities said mid-March that Sudworth was the target of a civil lawsuit for producing "fake news" about the region. "Everyone knows that the BBC broadcasts a large number of fake news with strong ideological bias," Hua Chunying, spokeswoman of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told reporters in Beijing.

But she denied the government had been behind the move to sue him and instead admonished Sudworth for leaving in a hurry and not clearing his name. "Why did he run away? What does this show?" she said. The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, an unofficial advocacy organization for foreign media operating in China, said Sudworth "forms one of an ever-larger number of journalists driven out of China by unacceptable harassment." It added that he had been kept on "a series of short visas, variously lasting one, three and six months," putting pressure on his ability to raise his young family. The club noted that attacks on Sudworth and the BBC escalated after the British broadcasting regulator revoked the license of Chinese state TV channel CGTN in February. —AFP

Pandemic delays gender parity by a generation: WEF

GENEVA: The pandemic has rolled back years of progress towards equality between men and women, according to a report released yesterday showing the crisis had added decades to the trajectory towards closing the gender gap. A range of studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, who have lost jobs at a higher rate than men, and had to take on much more of the extra childcare burden when schools closed.

The effects will be felt in the long-term, according to the World Economic Forum, which in its annual Global Gender Gap Report found that the goalposts for gender parity appeared to be moving further away. "There has been sort of a rollback to traditional behaviors inside the home, and that then creates a double shift for women who are working," WEF managing director Saadia Zahidi told a virtual press conference. The organization, which usually gathers the global elite in the plush Swiss ski resort of Davos each year, had found in its previous report, published in December 2019 right before the pandemic hit, that gender parity across a range of areas would be reached within 99.5 years.

But this year's report shows the world is not on track to close the gender gap for another 135.6 years. "Another generation of women will have to wait for gender parity," the WEF said in a statement.

Bust of Dagestani poet Rasul Gamzatov opened in Cairo

A bust of the outstanding Dagestani poet Rasul Gamzatov (1923 - 2003) was opened on Sunday, March 28, in the Egyptian capital Cairo. The ceremony took place in the city center, in the El-Hurriya park near the Cairo Opera House. Russian Ambassador Georgy Borisenko, Deputy Governor of the Egyptian capital General Mohammed Sultan, representatives of

the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, cultural and scientific workers, Russian diplomats and journalists took part in the celebration.

The monument was created by the Egyptian artist and sculptor, a member of the Association of graduates of Russian and Soviet universities, Osama Al-Serui. He presented the sculpture as a gift to the city administration. As the Russian ambassador noted in his speech, the opening of the monument will become one of the most striking events in the framework of the cross-year of humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Egypt. "Undoubtedly, this will help to familiarize the Egyptians with the richest cultural heritage of Russia," Borisenko said.

