



Migrants in Libya just want to leave

'Run Sara Run': Clamor grows for Duterte daughter presidential bid

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KUNDUZ: Taliban fighters check commuters along a road in Kunduz yesterday. — AFP

US, Taliban in face-to-face talks

Taliban warns US not to 'destabilize' regime

DOHA: The Taliban warned the United States not to "destabilize" the regime on Saturday during their first face-to-face talks since the US withdrawal, as a deadly sectarian bombing raised further questions about their grip on power. As mourners in northern Afghanistan buried their dead from an attack on a Shiite mosque that killed 62, a Taliban delegation told US officials in Doha that any weakening of their government could cause "problems for the people". Scores more worshippers were wounded in Friday's blast in Kunduz, which was claimed by the Islamic State group—who appear to be attempting to further shake Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

"We clearly told them that trying to destabilize the government in Afghanistan is good for no one," the Taliban's foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the Afghan state news agency Bakhtar after the talks in the Qatari capital. "Good relations with Afghanistan are good for everyone. Nothing should be done to weaken the existing government in Afghanistan which can lead to problems for the people," he said, in a recorded statement translated by AFP. The Taliban are seeking international recognition, as well as assistance to avoid a humanitarian disaster and ease Afghanistan's economic crisis.

A State Department official said the US delegation would press the Taliban to ensure terrorists do not create a base for attacks in the country. It would also pressure Afghanistan's new rulers to form an inclusive government and to respect the rights of women and girls, the official said, stressing the meeting did not indicate Washington recognized Taliban rule. "We remain clear that any legitimacy must be earned through the Taliban's own actions," the official said.

Taliban's bitter rivals As the two-day talks began, Kunduz counted the cost of the bloodiest assault since US forces left the country in August. A gravedigger in the Shiite cemetery overlooking the city told AFP they had handled 62 bodies, and local reports suggested the final toll could be up to 100. The regional branch of IS, known as Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), has repeatedly targeted Shiites in Afghanistan. It is a Sunni Islamist group like the Taliban, but the two

are bitter rivals. IS-K said the attack was carried out by a Uyghur suicide bomber who had "detonated an explosive vest amid a crowd" of Shiite worshippers.

The attack happened during Friday prayers—the most important of the week for Muslims—and residents of the city told AFP that hundreds of worshippers were inside. In a heart-wrenching scene, relatives gathered around the newly-dug graves in Kunduz wailed inconsolably over their loved ones. "We are really hurt by what happened," Zemarai Mubarak Zada, 42, told AFP as he mourned his 17-year-old nephew, who he said had wanted to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor. "He wanted to get married. He wanted to go to university," he said.

The Taliban's efforts to consolidate power have been undermined by a series of deadly IS-K attacks. The Taliban security chief in Kunduz accused the mosque attackers of trying to foment trouble between Shiites and Sunnis. "We assure our Shiite

brothers that in the future, we will provide security for them and that such problems will not happen to them," Mulawi Dost Muhammad said.

The attack was met with broad international condemnation, with UN chief Antonio Guterres calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Guterres "condemns in the strongest terms today's horrific attack", the third against a religious institution in Afghanistan in a week, his spokesman said. Viewed as heretics by Sunni extremists such as IS, Shiite Muslims have suffered some of Afghanistan's most violent assaults, with rallies bombed, hospitals targeted and commuters ambushed.

Shiites make up about 20 percent of the Afghan population. Many of them are Hazara, an ethnic group that has been persecuted for decades. Michael Kugelman, a South Asia expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, told AFP the Taliban would find it difficult to consolidate power unless they tackle terrorism and the growing economic crisis. "If the Taliban, as is likely, is unable to address these concerns, it will struggle to gain domestic legitimacy, and we could see the emergence of a new armed resistance," he said. — AFP



Deadly bombing raised further questions

16 killed in Russian parachutists' crash

MOSCOW: Sixteen people were killed when a plane carrying parachutists crashed in central Russia yesterday, the emergencies ministry said. The L-410 plane carrying 22 people crashed around 9:23 am near the town of Menzelinsk in the republic of Tatarstan, the ministry said on its Telegram channel. "Six people were rescued, 16 were taken out without signs of life," the ministry said. The ministry had earlier said 15 people died and that the aircraft was carrying 23 people.

While the Menzelinsk club organizes skydiving experiences for amateurs it has also hosted championships and training sessions for cosmonauts. Images published by the ministry showed the aircraft broken in half with a severely dented nose. The six survivors were taken to hospital, the local health ministry told the Interfax news agency. Tatarstan head Rustam Minnikhanov, who travelled to the scene, said pilots had reported an engine failure and requested an emergency landing shortly after taking off.

He said the plane tried to avoid a nearby residential area as it approached for landing but "the altitude didn't allow it". The plane hit a parked van with its wing and the aircraft turned over. All the survivors were sitting in the back of the plane, club instructor Oleg Shiporov told TASS news agency. Russian investigators have launched a criminal probe over the violation of safety rules. Today has been declared a day of



MENZELINSK: This handout picture shows wreckage at a site of the L-410 plane crash near the town of Menzelinsk in the Republic of Tatarstan. — AFP

mourning in Tatarstan. According to Interfax, the plane belonged to the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation and Navy of Russia, which describes itself as a sports and defense organization. The organization was created in the 1920s and Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to travel to space in 1961, has trained on its airfields.

The head of the Menzelinsk parachuting club said that it was not to blame for the accident. "We are the best, we are among the top five clubs," Ravil Nurmekhametov told TASS news agency, adding that the club had hosted European and World championships. "Cosmonauts train here," he said. TASS cited a source as saying that the state Cosmonauts

Training Centre has suspended its work with the club pending the investigation. In 2018, two amateur skydivers died while completing a group free-fall jump at the Menzelinsk club after their parachutes got tangled.

The Czech-built L-410 light aircraft was one of the two planes used by the club, according to its website. Two L-410 planes suffered fatal accidents in Russia earlier this year, leaving a total of eight people dead. Russia was notorious for plane accidents but has improved air traffic safety in recent years with major airlines switching from Soviet aircraft to modern jets. But poor maintenance and lax safety standards still lead to frequent accidents in far-flung regions involving light aircraft, with occasional large-scale tragedies.— AFP

Indian minister's son arrested over deaths at farmer protest

NEW DELHI: The son of an Indian minister has been arrested on preliminary charges of murder, police said yesterday, a week after the death of eight people during a farmers' protest sparked national outrage. Ashish Mishra was detained in Uttar Pradesh late Saturday over the incident in the northern state's Lakhimpur Kheri district, where farmers were demonstrating as part of their year-long campaign against contentious agriculture laws.

Farmers claimed that a convoy belonging to Mishra and his father—the junior home affairs minister Ajay Mishra—slammed into protesters, killing four of them. Angry demonstrators then set fire to several cars and four other people, including a driver and a journalist, were killed, according to authorities and local media reports.

Mishra was arrested on grounds of "non-cooperation" and "evasive replies" during an

hours-long interrogation, Deputy Inspector General of Police Upendra Kumar Agrawal told reporters. Mishra will face court today and formal charges have to be filed within 90 days. Mishra and his father have denied the allegations. India's Supreme Court had said Friday that it was "not satisfied" with the police investigation of the case and questioned why the younger Mishra had not yet been arrested.

The incident was the deadliest since farmers started camping on the outskirts of the capital New Delhi in November demanding a repeal of the controversial laws. The agriculture sector, which employs some two-thirds of India's 1.3 billion population, has long been a political minefield. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government says the sector is massively inefficient and in need of reform. But farmers fear the changes will leave them at the mercy of big corporations.— AFP