



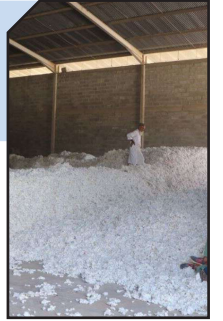
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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Issue No. 808

www.heartofasia.af

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Covid-19: Afghan border agencies get protective gear

The European Union (EU) has provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies to Afghanistan's border agencies to help combat the spread of coronavirus, a statement said on Tuesday.

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), an international organisation, has provided infrared thermometers, N95 Masks and PPE gowns, gloves and sanitation supplies, thanks to the generous financial support of the European Union. The statement said the equipment will be used at border crossing points by the Afghan Border Police, Customs and the Afghan Border Security Force.

The equipment will allow officers working at Afghanistan's border crossing points and land-borders to protect themselves when screening travelers, disinfect surfaces and isolate sick travelers at the borders, in line ... **P3**



Pompeo, Lavrov Discuss Afghanistan-related Issues After Bounty Report

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed issues related to Afghanistan with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, said the U.S. State Department, following reports of Russian military intelligence unit offering bounties to Taliban-linked militants to kill U.S. troops. White House has downplayed the reports of alleged Russian bounties, saying they were not verified or substantiated by the intelligence community.

In the formal request for full House briefing, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had said that the administration's "disturbing silence and inaction" endanger the lives of US troops and coalition partners. She said that Trump's refusal to stand up to the Russians also jeopardises lives in the region, as the Afghan government and the United States are engaged in critical peace negotiations with the Taliban.

The heightened concerns led to a classified "Gang of 8" ... **P3**

Afghan Civilian Casualties Fell 11% But Still High



A report by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) shows that 1,213 civilians were killed and 1,740 civilians were wounded in the first six months of this year, an 11% reduction from the same period in

2019. The reduction comes amid increasing peace efforts by the Afghan government and its allies, but critics say violence is still high--especially by the Taliban--which is a key element of the peace process.

In 2019, the AIHRC findings showed that 979 civilians were killed and 2,359 others were wounded in the first six months of the year. For the current period, the report says an average of 16 civilians a day became victims of violence

in Afghanistan during this period, and blamed the Taliban for 48.5% of the casualties and Afghan forces for 15.5% percent.

The report blames "unknown perpetrators" for 26.7% of the casualties, Daesh for 6.3% and international forces for 2.3% of the civilian casualties in the first six months of this year.

The remaining percentage of civilian casualties, the report says, were caused by rocket shelling of Pakistani forces on Kunar, Kandahar, Paktia, and Khost provinces in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

The report states that 542 civilians were killed and 896 others were wounded in Taliban attacks during this period, which is a 24% decrease compared to the same period in 2019.

Civilian casualties in Taliban attacks in 2019 were 1,912 killed or wounded, the report highlights. The report says the incident types included targeted killings (31% of casualties), IEDs (26%), rocket attacks (11.7%), ground battles (no percentage mentioned), ... **P3**

Afghanistan Rugby Federation, Inside Asia Rugby

Asia Rugby announced on the 8th of July that Afghanistan Rugby Federation was granted full membership of Asia Rugby. A historic milestone for the Union that has overcome many obstacles. In the last two years, the Union has been working on all aspects of growing the game.

Asia Rugby President Qais Al-Dhalai congratulated Mr Haris Rahmani, the President of Afghanistan Rugby Federation "let me express my honest and sincere congratulations to you personally, ARF family and the nation of Afghanistan for this recent achievement. It's an achievement that came after many years ... **P3**



U.S. closes 5 military bases in Afghanistan

A US official in Kabul, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Tuesday that the five bases closed in Afghanistan--in compliance with the US-Taliban peace agreement--were in Helmand, Uruzgan, Paktika and Laghman provinces. The US peace envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, in a tweet on Tuesday morning said: "As we look to the next phase of implementation under the Agreement, our approach will remain conditions based. We will press for completion of prisoner releases, reduction of violence, complete delivery on CT (counterterrorism) commitments and start of and progress in intra-Afghan negotiations." The US has rapidly implemented the first phase of its commitments under the agreement, "including



to reduce forces and depart five bases. NATO troops have come down in proportional numbers," according to Khalilzad. US troops in the country have been reduced to 8,600, according to US reports. NATO has around 12,000 troops under the Resolute Support mission, which includes a portion of the 8,600 total US troops, according to the Resolute Support mission.

The US continues "our counter terror fight against groups like ISIS (Daesh) and al-Qaeda while also providing training, funding and supplies to ANDSF through the NATO RS mission," said US troops spokesman in Afghanistan on Tuesday.

The US-Taliban deal signed on February 28 in Doha has remained unimplemented in some parts of the agreement, such ... **P2**

Trump has...

American history." However, they are not the case. The Washington Post is one of the largest and most influential newspapers in the United States. In 2013, it was acquired by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos for 250 million U.S dollars. The paper often criticizes the Trump administration's actions, which angered the U.S. president, accusing the newspaper of publishing "fake news."

'A third of...

could be flooded "in a worst-case scenario".

In Assam, northeast India, more than 2.1 million people have been affected since mid-May.

At least 50 people have died so far - 12 in the past week as floodwaters surged - with tens of thousands of mostly rural residents evacuated to relief camps, officials said.

"We have two challenges here: one is COVID-19 and another is flood," the head of a local rescue team, Abhijeet Kumar Verma, told AFP.

In Nepal, at least 50 people have died in landslides and floods triggered by the monsoon rains, with homes swept away and roads and bridges damaged.

Russia ...

"This is also an issue concerning Turkey's sovereign rights," he explained.

On Friday, a Turkish court annulled a 1934 Cabinet decree that had turned Hagia Sophia into a museum, paving the way for its use again as a mosque after an 85-year hiatus. Before 1934 it had been a mosque for nearly 500 years.

Meeting Monday, EU foreign ministers condemned the move.

By Oğuzhan Ertuğrul, Ambassador of Turkey in Afghanistan

After the coup attempt by FETÖ, Turkish-Afghan brotherhood proved to be time-tested

It all started under the guise of a charitable education effort. They presented themselves as a benign education movement, when they started the campaign of establishing schools in Turkey and later around the world including Afghanistan. However, this was indeed the first step of an infiltration campaign where kids and their parents were recruited with the seemingly innocent promise of a better education and a good job. It has become obvious years later that for decades, Fetullah Gülen had directed his followers to infiltrate all critical state organs, first and foremost the police, the judiciary and the armed forces.

On July 15, 2016, the treasonous putschists in the Turkish military misguided by him tried to overthrow the democratically elected government and did not hesitate to target democratic institutions of Turkey. Fetullah Gülen's Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) attacked the Presidency compound and bombarded the Turkish Parliament while the MPs were in session, along with its attempt to assassinate the President. The terrorists violently raided the headquarters of free media, which never ceased to air calls for defending democracy under such a circumstance. Millions of Turkish citizens set aside their political differences to form a unified front against the plotters, who tried to suspend the constitution and shot at innocent civilians. United, the Turkish people refused to allow an armed group to rob them of democracy, liberty and their way of life. In thwarting this assault, 251 citizens lost their lives and more than 2,000 were injured.

July 15 was a stark revelation of the existential threat that targeted the very foundations of the Turkish state. It was the worst act of terror in the history of the Republic. July 15 was also a trial of strength and perseverance for the Turkish democracy and the State. All political parties, both in government

and in opposition, the uninfected elements of the Armed Forces, the Police and the media stood up against the putschists. Above all, the Turkish people from all backgrounds and political views resisted and displayed a historic example of solidarity as they stood selflessly in front of the tanks and reclaimed their democratic rights.

Indeed, the Turkish Government had already taken action against this cultish organization and its financial resources before July 15. The decision to shut down prep-schools was a huge blow against this structure, since these schools were the main recruitment centers and a major financial source for FETÖ. It was followed by a series of administrative and judicial investigations into the criminal aspects of the organization, including their large-scale cheating at the admission tests for public institutions, illegal wiretappings, money laundering operations, and many others. The police and the judiciary also had taken measures to discharge FETÖ members from their official positions. In short, FETÖ was about to lose its power in Turkey. Attempting to capture the state on July 15, 2016 was their last chance to survive.

FETÖ is not a benign civic education movement as some circles including a few Afghans try hard to portray. It would be a huge mischaracterization to think of Gülen merely as a peaceful Islamic scholar and preacher.

We are faced with a global enterprise, with global aspirations of power and dominance. FETÖ used to function in more than 150 countries around the world, through schools, NGOs, lobbyists, media outlets and companies, including Afghanistan. What happened in Turkey four years ago today is a reminder of what this clandestine organization may be capable of in countries it operates. FETÖ used to run 12 schools and three study centers in Afghanistan before the



coup attempt. They were able to cover their heinous goals and to finance their activities. Revenues from these schools were illegally transferred outside Afghanistan, and not a single Afghani was invested.

Following the signature in February 2018 of the Memorandum of Understanding between Education Ministries of Afghanistan and Turkey, 15 FETÖ-linked schools and study centers have been transferred to Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF). Since then, Turkey overhauled the infrastructure of all school facilities we took over in Herat, Jalalabad, Sheberghan, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Kabul. We have opened four additional schools and three study centers in Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat.

As a historical brother and a true friend of Afghanistan, we place particular emphasis to the education of the children of martyrs who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defending their country. We also provide scholarships for these children. Scholarships are also available for the students who graduate with remarkable grades. Discounts are made on tuitions fees to reach out to Afghan children from different parts of Afghanistan.

As students and their parents have been witnessing the increased quality of the education and sharing their positive feedbacks with the Afghan authorities and public, we have started to receive demands to enhance our engagement

with Afghanistan in the education sector. As a result, we agreed to work in tandem with the Afghan Ministry of Education to bolster the national education strategy. TMF provided online courses for the Ministry of Education, since the early days of Covid-19 pandemic. We also contributed medical supplies for the people of Afghanistan in line with our brotherhood. We transformed the education network created by FETÖ from a random business model based on customer-client relationship to a sustainable model in which all revenue will be re-invested to strengthen the Afghan education system.

In critical times like July 15, a friend in need is a true friend indeed. We highly appreciate and are grateful for the support given by our Afghan brothers' and sisters' on that day. We have overcome the coup attempt together. Afghan people's solidarity on that day was another monumental moment in the joint history of two countries. We are committed to demonstrate our gratitude by providing every support in our capacity to Afghan people, as long as it is needed. We are also thankful for the support provided by the Afghan authorities in this fight against FETÖ. A handful of Afghans who give guidance, and help the FETÖ elements in Afghanistan should realize that their effort is in vain, and they will not be able to poison this time-tested, privileged relationship between the two brotherly nations.

By Journal-Courier staff

Don't let meddling derail Afghanistan withdrawal plans

There's a lot still missing from the reports that Russia paid for attacks on American and other coalition forces in Afghanistan. That's why it's critical that emotions and politics be kept at bay until the facts are in. Some important context might come from a hearing on the matter by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, even though Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has declined to attend.

The charges are explosive, and the public — especially the families of fallen soldiers — deserves some honest answers. The reports in The Times and other news media cite intelligence findings that a Russian military intelligence unit rewarded fighter linked to the Taliban for targeting American troops, possibly disbursing money through a shadowy Afghan middleman named Rahmatullah Azizi. The findings are said to have been relayed to the White House in a regular intelligence briefing that President Donald Trump says he never saw.

The logical next step for the president should have been to acknowledge the gravity of the allegations and demand a full report. Instead, Trump dismissed the story in a tweet as "just another made up by Fake News tale that is told only to damage me and the Republican Party," even as he acknowledged that the information was contained in intelligence reports. Inevitably, the response resurrected speculation about Trump's unexplained affinity for Vladimir Putin, most recently displayed in attempts to include the Russian leader in a meeting of the Group of Seven.

Robert O'Brien, the national security adviser, said this month that the Justice Department was considering an investigation into whoever may have leaked the information.

The Trump administration's response to this story raises critical questions about whether it is focusing sufficient attention on the plight of American soldiers

deployed far from their homeland and on dangerous ground. John Bolton's new book about his time as Trump's national security adviser is only the latest depiction of a president incapable of absorbing policy briefings.

But this issue is not solely a question of Trump's competence. From the various news accounts, others in the White House and Congress were also apparently advised of the claims, yet no one reacted until the allegations were made public in The Times.

Then there's the question of the motives behind the leaks and the solidity of the information.

Afghanistan is a forbidding country that has repeatedly confounded invaders. There is no question that the war there has been rife with atrocities, shifting alliances and dubious sources of funds and arms. Trump is right to try to pull Americans out after more than two decades of inconclusive fighting. Yet the public anger aroused by the bounties story will not ...

P3

UN's top court...

June 2017, Qatar maintained the four blockading countries acted illegally and in violation of international law. In a statement, the Qatari government said Tuesday's "verdict is the latest in a series of international judgements vindicating" its position. Al Jazeera's Step Vaessen, reporting from The Hague, said the ruling meant "the ICAO has done the job correctly and can deal with the case from now on."

The blockade

The four Arab countries abruptly severed ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing the country of backing "extremists" among other allegations that Doha strongly denies.

They imposed wide-ranging punitive measures, including banning Qatari planes from their airspace, closing

Qatar's only land border with Saudi Arabia and expelling Qatari citizens. The countries justified the moves against the peninsular Gulf state, saying it was their sovereign right to protect their national security.

Qatar fiercely rejected the claims that it violated a series of agreements reached with its neighbours in 2013 and 2014 aimed at settling years of diplomatic rancour.

Last year, the ICJ - set up in 1946 to rule in disputes between UN member states - rejected a request by the UAE to take special measures against Qatar, after Doha won a case at the ICJ in 2018 over alleged discrimination against its citizens.

Doha in June again accused the Saudi-led alliance of refusing to engage with efforts, which it said were backed by the United States, to resolve the crisis.

U.S. closes 5...

as a reduction in violence and intra-Afghan negotiations, which should have happened 135 days after the accord. The intra-Afghan talks have not begun and violence has not been reduced.

Monday was the 136th day after the peace deal was signed, which raises

hopes among the Afghan people and political elites who believed it would lead the country towards negotiations.

The Afghan government has blamed the Taliban for not implementing their commitments, saying the movements by the group should be scrutinized after the peace deal.

Cotton ginning Factory reopens in Helmand province

"Revitalizing the cotton processing plant in Helmand is a welcoming step by the government that can encourage the farmers to grow cotton in their farmlands," whispered a farmer Abdul Khaliq from the restive Nad Ali district.

The cotton-processing factory commonly known "Tasadi Bost Helmand" is the only industrial unit of its type in the troubled Helmand and the neighboring Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces that has been badly damaged and shut down due to the prolonged war.

The government has rebuilt the factory recently to promote cotton cultivation in the militancy-battered province and provide job opportunities for the war-weary people.

The poppy-growing and militancy-plagued Helmand has long been regarded as the hotbed of the Taliban in Afghanistan as the armed group has been ruling parts of the province over the past more than a decade.

"If the government supports the farmers by providing fertilizer, seeds,



and easy loans, and buying their products at a reasonable price, then the farmers would definitely replace poppy with cotton in their farmlands," Khaliq told Xinhua recently.

Khaliq who has already begun cotton cultivation in his farmlands said that Helmand's cotton was popular in the past, saying he is hopeful that the government could support the cotton growers in the province to revive its reputation.

Appreciating the revival of the cotton-

processing plant, provincial governor Mohammad Yasin Khan has told reporters recently that some 300 workers would be hired by the factory in the first phase. In the meantime, thousands of farmers would be encouraged to cultivate cotton.

According to the governor, the factory will buy 4,000 tons of cotton from the farmers this year.

The factory, he said, will also produce cooking oil, soap and other goods, besides processing the soft fiber.

Countless factories and plants including textile, cement and sugar plants have been destroyed or badly damaged by the protracted war, and the government, according to the official, is committed to reviving all the industrial units elsewhere in the country.

"It is a good news for the farmers to plant cotton, I appreciate it, but water scarcity is an obstacle to develop cotton plantation," another farmer Khairullah, 35, told Xinhua.

Afghan Civilian...

airstrikes (killed 108 civilians) and night raids (4 civilians killed).

The report says there was a 44 percent reduction in civilian casualties caused by airstrikes and 90% decrease in civilian casualties caused by night raids in the first six months of this year compared to the same period last year.

The AIHRC report indicates that the northwestern zone has endured the highest number of civilian casualties in the first six months of this year with 319 civilians killed and 373 others wounded.

The less affected areas were the western zone with 240 casualties (killed and wounded).

"All warring parties should leave violence and focus on negotiations," AIHRC Deputy Chief Naeem Nazari said. Victims' families have often called for justice as two Kabul residents who lost their relatives in an attack early in March said the raid that happened on a gathering of politicians has yet to be probed.

"Such attacks show the weakness of the government," said Suhaila Shujaee, a Kabul resident, referring to the March 7 attack on Afghan politicians gathering in the west of Kabul.

The report says there has been 0.5% reduction in women casualties in the first six months of this year compared to 2019. It shows that 126 women were killed and 171 others wounded during this period.

The report comes as five people were killed and 11 others wounded in a blast Surobi district, 60 kilometers east of Kabul.

Pompeo, Lavrov...

briefing and Pelosi issued a joint statement with Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer. Pelosi accused President Donald Trump of being soft on his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on issues of NATO, G7, Crimea, Ukraine and the ongoing "undermining of the integrity of our elections".

"Our Armed Forces would be better served if President Trump spent more time reading his daily briefing and less time planning military parades and defending relics of the Confederacy," Pelosi added.

"Nevertheless, what else could be expected from the intelligence agency that has failed miserably in the 20-year-long war in

Afghanistan," the statement read. Notably, Pompeo also raised the issue of election security with Lavrov after US officials hinted a possible Russian interference in the upcoming presidential elections. They also discussed convening P5 leaders in the near future to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

Don't let...

go away by claiming "hoax" or dismissing the payments as collateral damage of a dirty war. Legislators from both parties are already demanding explanations, and the House Armed Services Committee voted by a large bipartisan majority for an amendment to the defense bill to make any further withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan contingent on an assessment

of whether any country has offered incentives for the Taliban to attack American and other coalition troops.

It is unfortunate to connect the issue of possible Russian payoffs with the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The administration ought to provide more information to lawmakers, which is why it was a missed opportunity for Pompeo to decline to attend the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing.

But whatever those investigations reveal, the war in Afghanistan needs to be brought to an end. Putin's intelligence services shouldn't get a say in what is in the best interests of the United States.

The threat to Trump's withdrawal deal alone should encourage the president to get to the bottom of the issue, and if necessary to confront Russia with the numerous tools of statecraft at his disposal.

Afghanistan Rugby...

and upon intensive and extensive efforts from you, your Board, players, referees, fans and the whole people who belong to Afghanistan Rugby".

Mr Haris Rahmani, the President of Afghanistan Rugby Federation said, "After a decade of activities and hard work we have achieved Asia Rugby Full Membership status. It is a great achievement for me and for the team"

I want to thank the President of Asia Rugby Mr Qais Al-Dhalai who is also a good friend who has supported us a lot. And I also have to thank Afghanistan National Olympic Committee and General Directorate of Physical Education & Sports of Afghanistan, "Dr Wali Rahimi" Afghanistan's journey goes back to 2011 and when the National side played their first match against New Zealand Special Air

Services troops in Kabul's free zone.

The Afghan team's first international match was played as an exhibition Rugby Sevens match against the United Arab Emirates Sheen team on 27 April 2012. Recently the Men's 7s team has taken part in the Asian Games and last year in Olympic Qualification tournament in Incheon, Korea where they reached the Quarter Finals.

Covid-19:...

with international good practices. These steps may help prevent the spread of the disease as well as allowing border crossings to remain open for business.

"Our support to Afghan border agencies is part of EU's overall commitment to strengthen Afghanistan's regional dimension and connectivity", said Pierre Mayaudon, EU Ambassador to

Afghanistan.

"The Government of Afghanistan and ICMPD will need to continue our close cooperation to ensure Afghanistan's border agencies have the tools and knowledge necessary to respond to crisis such as COVID-19", said Sedef Dearing, Regional Coordinator for the Silk Routes Region, ICMPD. In the long-term, border agencies will need to step up

their capacities on health-related issues, including crisis management and contingency planning.

The PPE equipment was provided with the support of an existing European Union funded project implemented by ICMPD aimed at supporting the development of an Integrated Border Management approach in Afghanistan.

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Trump has made 20,000 false or misleading claims since taking office

U.S president Donald Trump has made 20,000 false or misleading claims since he took the office on January 20, 2017, the Washington Post reported on July 14.

The paper's Fact Checker column pointed out Trump hit the milestone on July 9, a day on which he delivered 62 such claims, bringing the total to 20,055.

It said that Trump made untrue statements on various domestic and international topics.

Over the last 14 months, such events included comments on his impeachment procedures, the COVID-19 pandemic and the police killing of African-American George Floyd. Trump has averaged 23 false or misleading claims a day.

The paper also highlighted that the president has expressed about 1,200 lies and misleading claims about COVID-19, many of which are connected to the testing capacity of the United States. Trump often claims the America has the best record

on testing around the world, while its experts say testing in the U.S. is far behind the size of its outbreak.

The paper started its database during the president's first 100 days in office. Its staff have then gone through every statement made by him at press conferences and rallies, TV appearances and on social media.

In the first 100 days, the Post's Fact Checker recorded 492 false or misleading claims made by Trump, which means he made these fake claims nearly five times a day. Since then, the recorders notes "the tsunami of untruths just keeps looming larger and larger."

The Post noted that the president often distorts facts, such as by saying: "The current state of the U.S. economy is the best in the history of the country." In addition, Trump also regularly announced "building a wall on the border with Mexico" and "the largest tax cut in ... **P2**



A look at the world

Russia 'concerned' over Azerbaijani-Armenian clashes

Russia is deeply concerned over the border clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

He called on the sides to exercise restraint, adding that Russia is ready to serve as a mediator in finding a peace solution.

"We are deeply concerned about the shootings on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. We call on both sides to exercise restraint and respect their obligations under the cease-fire. Russia, as we have already stated at various levels, is ready to provide its mediation efforts for a settlement, as a co-chair of the Minsk group," Peskov said. The Organization for Security and



Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group -- co-chaired by France, Russia and the US -- was formed to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, but has yet to get any results.

Seven Azerbaijani soldiers were martyred, including a general and a major in a border clash with Armenian troops on Sunday.

Upper Karabakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh, an internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan, has been illegally occupied since 1991 through Armenian military aggression. However, "Turkey rejects the words of condemnation used by the EU for turning Hagia Sophia back into a mosque," said Foreign Minister Cavusoglu during a meeting with his Maltese counterpart in the capital Ankara.

"As I stated earlier, if [Josep] Borell, EU foreign policy chief, said 'it would be better if it didn't open,' I respect that. If he said 'it would be better if it stayed a museum,' I also respect that; but we reject the word 'condemn,'" said Cavusoglu.

Pointing to the 800-year Moorish heritage in EU member Spain, he added: "In Spain, there are some mosques which were turned into churches. So now shall we say to Spain, 'convert those back into mosques, we condemn you?'" ... **P2**

'A third of Bangladesh underwater' after heavy rains, floods



A third of Bangladesh is underwater after some of the heaviest rains in a decade, officials said. Almost four million people have also been hit by monsoon floods in South Asia.

The monsoon - which usually falls from June to September - is crucial to the economy of the Indian sub-continent, but also causes widespread death and destruction across the region every year.

"This is going to be the worst flood in a decade," Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre chief Arifuzzaman Bhuiyan told the AFP news agency.

The floods started late last month, and after briefly easing continued to worsen, destroying crops and driving people from their homes in several impoverished regions.

Bangladesh is crisscrossed by 230 rivers, including 53 shared with India.

The heavy rains have swollen two main Himalayan river systems - the Brahmaputra and the Ganges - that flow through India and Bangladesh.

Bhuiyan said about a third of flood-prone Bangladesh - a delta-nation crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers - was underwater, and at least 1.5 million people were affected, with village homes and roads flooded.

"The floodwater is constantly rising. Neither we nor our cattle can go out. So, I'm using a boat to go out. We're having issues regarding food also. The cooking ovens have been flooded. Even our beds are also underwater," Samsud Doha, farmer, said.

In north-central Bangladesh, the Brahmaputra river was almost 40cm (15.7 inches) higher than normal and threatening to burst its banks, district administrator Farook Ahmed told AFP.

Most villagers were trying to stay near their flood-damaged homes, but some 15,000 had fled severely affected areas, officials said.

Another farmer, Rabiul Islam, said: "Our homesteads have been flooded. We had a little road left which got destroyed last night. So, we're taking away all our crops like rice and corn and other goods."

With a 10-day forecast pointing to rising waters, Bhuiyan said if more rivers burst their banks, some 40 percent of the nation ... **P2**

UN's top court backs Qatar in air blockade row with neighbours

The International Court of Justice, the UN's top court, has backed Qatar in a dispute with four neighbours that imposed an air blockade against Doha more than three years ago.

The Hague-based ICJ on Tuesday rejected the appeal by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against a decision by the world civil aviation body in favour of Qatar over sovereign airspace, ICJ President Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf said on Tuesday.

The court also "holds that the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has jurisdiction" in the case, by 15 judges to one, Yusuf said.

The ICAO in 2018 ruled it had jurisdiction



to handle a dispute brought by Qatar, which accused its neighbours of violating a convention that regulates the free passage of its passenger planes through foreign airspace.

But the four allies disagreed saying the ICAO was not the right body to judge in the dispute and its decision to do so was "manifestly flawed and in violation of fundamental principles of due process and the right to be heard".

They had asked the ICJ to declare the aviation body's ruling "null and void and without effect".

'Arguments dismantled'

Doha welcomed Tuesday's ruling saying it will lead the blockading countries to "face justice" for violating international aviation rules.

"We are confident that the ICAO will ultimately find these actions unlawful," Jassim Saif Ahmed Al Sulaiti, minister for transport and communications, said in a statement.

"This is the latest in a series of rulings that expose the blockading countries' continued disregard for international law and due process. Step by step their arguments are being dismantled, and Qatar's position vindicated," Al Sulaiti added.

Since the start of the blockade in ... **P2**



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