

US Assassination Of Soleimani Breached International Norms: UN Rapporteur

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United Nations: A United Nations (UN) special rapporteur says the US assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was in breach of international norms and the UN charter.

Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur for extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions, made the remarks in a briefing in Geneva on Tuesday, saying, "The targeted killing of General Solei-



mani has breached many international norms that are at the heart of the UN system and the heart of UN charter."

"The UN Charter was predicated on the notion that we should do all we can to prevent armed conflict and that the use of force should be very much narrowed down to very few scenarios," Callamard said.

"The targeted killing of Mr. Soleimani completely swept away the standard related to extrajudicial use of force by a state. It targeted a state official while in the past it was mostly non-state actors or only non-state actors that had been targeted," she added.

The UN special rapporteur stressed that the assassination of the top Iranian commander set a dangerous precedent that could "be a recipe for disaster."

Early last month, a drone strike, conducted by direct order of US President Donald Trump, martyred Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known as Hashed al-Sha'abi in Arabic, and their companions outside Baghdad International Airport.

Both commanders were admired by Muslim nations for eliminating the US-sponsored Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Soon after General Soleimani's assassination, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Washington was to face a "harsh revenge" for the atrocity.

On January 8, the IRGC unleashed volleys of ballistic missiles at the American military airbase of Ain al-Assad in Iraq's Anbar Province, which housed US forces. The Leader later described the retaliatory strikes as "only a slap."

The US assassination of the top Iranian commander sent shock waves across the world while, at the same time, forging greater unity in the region against US interventionism.

Iraqi lawmakers also took action by unanimously approving a bill, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

Ahead of mayoral vote, Macron Vows To Tackle 'Political Islam'



Agencies

Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron has said he will curb the practice of foreign countries sending imams and teachers to France to crack down on what he calls the risk of "separatism".

Macron has so far stayed away from issues related to France's Muslim community, the biggest in Europe, focusing instead on economic reforms.

But in a much-anticipated intervention less than a month before mayoral elections, Macron on Tuesday said he would gradually put an end to the system in which Algeria, Morocco and Turkey send imams to France to preach in mosques.

"This end to the consular Islam system is extremely important

to curb foreign influence and make sure everybody respects the laws of the republic," he told reporters in the eastern city of Mulhouse.

Macron said 300 imams were sent to France every year by these countries, and that those who arrived in 2020 would be the last to arrive in such numbers.

He said his government had asked the body representing Islam in France to find solutions to train imams on French soil instead, ensure they can speak French and do not spread "Islamist" views.

Macron, who is constantly attacked by far-right leader Marine Le Pen on the issue of how to integrate French Muslims, also said he would end the practice of French students being taught by teachers paid by foreign governments.



Climate Change Threatens Future Of All Children: UN Report

Agencies

United Nations: The future of every single child in the world is at risk as nations across the world fail to curb the effects of climate change and provide a clean and healthy environment essential for their well-being, according to a report commissioned by the United Nations.

"Climate change, ecological degradation, migrating populations, conflict, pervasive inequalities, and predatory commercial practices threaten the health and future of children in every country," the report, authored by more than 40 child and adolescent health experts, said.

While the children in wealthy nations have a better chance at survival and well-being, those same countries disproportionately contribute to the carbon emissions threatening the future of all children.

The joint report by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and medical journal The Lancet found.

It further added that not a single country performed well in all three categories measured: child flourishing, sustainability, and equity.

"Countries need to overhaul their approach to child and adolescent health, to ensure that we not only look after our children today but protect the world they will inherit in the future," said New Zealand's former Prime Minister Helen Clark, who is now the co-chair of the international commission that produced the report.

Exploitative marketing practices

The report also highlighted the threats to children posed by the commercial sector. Exposure to marketing and advertisements of junk food, and fat- and sugar-laden foods are linked to obesity

among children.

The number of obese children and adolescents increased tenfold from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million by 2016, the authors noted.

Children are also exposed to advertisements of products meant for adults — such as alcohol, tobacco and gambling — boosting their chances of consumption.

Children at the heart of Sustainable Development Goals

The report calls for children to be placed at the center of the efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals agreed in 2015.

"The SDGs convey a dual vision: to protect our planet from a dangerous and uncertain future and to ensure that we deliver secure, fair, and healthy lives for future generations. Children are at the heart of this vision, with their own needs, rights, perspectives, and contributions," it said.

UK To Close Door To Non-English Speakers And Unskilled Workers

Agencies

London: Britain is to close its borders to unskilled workers and those who can't speak English as part of a fundamental overhaul of immigration laws that will end the era of cheap EU labour in factories, warehouses, hotels and restaurants.

Unveiling its Australian-style points system on Wednesday, the government will say it is grasping a unique opportunity to take "full control" of British borders "for the first time in decades" and eliminate the "distortion" caused by EU freedom of movement.

But industry leaders immediately accused the government of an assault on the economy warning of "disastrous" consequences with job losses and closures in factories and the high street.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats also condemned the plans while Unison, which represents health workers said they "spell absolute disaster for the care sector".

Immigration points criteria

However, ministers argue

they are delivering the Brexit demanded by the electorate — and say it is time for businesses to wean themselves off cheap migrant labour.

A 10-page briefing document outlining the new immigration policy states:

- UK borders will be closed to non-skilled workers — and all migrants will have to speak English.
- Anyone wanting to come to the UK to work must have a job offer with a salary threshold of £25,600 — though a salary "floor" of £20,480 will be acceptable in special cases where there might be a skills shortage skills, such as in nursing.
- There will be no route for self-employed people coming into the UK, spelling the end to, for example, Polish plumbers or Romanian builders arriving without a job.
- Border control will no longer accept ID cards from countries such as France and Italy. This, it is understood, is an attempt to clamp down on

non-EU workers beating the system with forged or stolen ID cards.

The skills threshold for foreign nationals wanting to work in the UK will be lowered from degree to A-levels or their equivalent. The cap on the numbers of skilled workers is being scrapped — and a small number of highly skilled workers will be allowed to come in without a job.

The right of artists, entertainers, sports people and musicians to enter for performances, competitions and auditions will be retained.

The government intends to launch a "comprehensive" campaign to prepare employers for the transformation in January next year when EU citizens will be treated the same as other nationals.

However, the new policy drew immediate criticism from employers, particularly over the addition of waiters, waitresses and "elementary" agriculture and fishery workers to the list of low-skilled workers.

Coronavirus Slows China's Belt And Road Push

Agencies

Beijing: When President Xi Jinping made his first state visit this year to Myanmar and signed new infrastructure contracts, there was no indication of the obstacle about to trip up China's plan for railways, ports and highways around the world: the new coronavirus COVID-19.

Travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the disease, which has now killed more than 1,800 people, have idled much of the world's second-largest economy and choked key elements of Xi's signature Belt and Road Ini-

Boyang Xue, a China analyst at Ducker Frontier. "Since many BRI projects tend to source equipment and machinery from manufacturers based in China, the disruptions in industrial production and supply chain will cause further delays."

One giant project, China Railway International Group's \$6 billion high-speed railway in Indonesia, is on a war footing.

The state enterprise has set up a task force to monitor the coronavirus' spread and urged all Chinese employees who went home for the Lunar New Year holiday not to return to Indonesia, a senior executive with the company said on con-



tiative (BRI).

Chinese workers cannot get to overseas projects, and factories are cut off from the Chinese imports they need to keep running, according to more than a dozen company executives and officials.

"Many factories in China remain closed; those that are open cannot reach full capacity," said

dition of anonymity, as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

The company has stopped more than 100 Chinese personnel, mostly skilled workers or managers, from returning to the project linking Indonesia's capital Jakarta with the textile hub of Bandung, about 140 kilometres away, the executive said.

Pak Court Gives Death Sentence To 3 Terrorists For 2014 Wagah Bombing

Press Trust Of India

Lahore: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court on Wednesday handed down death sentence and 300 years of imprisonment to three terrorists of the banned Jamaat-ul-Ahrar for their involvement in the 2014 Wagah border bombing that killed over 60 people.

Wagah is a village located in Lahore, Pakistan's Punjab province, and Attari in India's Punjab state along the Indo-Pak border.

Over 60 people, including women and children, were killed in the horrific suicide attack on November 2, 2014 at the Wagah border on the Pakistani side.

The responsibility for the attack was claimed separately by the outlawed Jundullah and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan's splinter group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar.

"The Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore on Wednesday announced the verdict in the Wagah border bombings. It handed down death sentence to three suspects — Haseebullah, Saeed Jan Ghana and Hussainullah — on five counts and also gave them 300-year jail term and imposed a fine of Pakistani Rupees 1 million on each of them," a court official told PTI.

The court acquitted three other suspects giving them the benefit of doubt. More than 100 prosecution witnesses testified against the accused during the trial that lasted

more than five years.

The suspects were brought to the court amidst tight security.

The Jamaat-ul-Ahrar spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan had told Dawn on telephone from Afghani-



stan after the Wagah blast that it was carried out by one of their men.

Later, Ehsan was arrested by Pakistani security agencies but recently he managed to escape from their custody drawing criticism from the opposition parties.

At least 15 to 20 kg of explosives was used in the blast with some of the explosives in the attacker's suicide jacket and the remaining being carried by him.

The blast at the Wagah crossing was a high-profile target, with large crowds gathering every day to watch an elaborate flag-lowering ceremony as the border with India closes.

NEWSMAKERS

'Namaste Trump': US president's superfans gear up for his arrival in India

Bussa Krishna first began worshipping Donald Trump four years ago when the US president appeared to him a dream.

Since then, after a run of good fortune, the Indian real estate broker has transformed his modest home into a shrine to the US leader, who is due in India on Monday for a two-day visit.

"My love for him has transformed into reverence. That has given me immense happiness. Hence instead of praying to other gods, I started praying to him," Krishna told Reuters.

Krishna, who lives alone in a village in the southern state of Telangana, has erected a life-size statue to Trump in his yard, while his walls are scrawled with the leader's name — to the annoyance of his extended family.

"I am facing difficulties because of my relatives," Krishna



said. "They tell me that I am disgracing them in society. I told them that just like you believe and worship Shiva, I believe and worship Trump. Neither of us can stop the other from doing so."

Krishna is not the only In-

dian who reveres Trump.

In New Delhi, members of the Hindu Sena, a right-wing fringe group, have begun rehearsing a welcome song in his honour.

Its members say Trump shares their hatred of "Islamic

extremism", and it has drawn attention for boisterous celebrations of his birthday, including pretending to feed cake to photos of his face.

"We like Donald Trump because he openly spoke about India's feelings," Hindu Sena leader Vishnu Gupta told Reuters.

"He openly said that he would eliminate Islamic terrorism from its roots, that is why I am his fan."

Trump, who like Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a reputation as an unabashed populist who shows his enemies no mercy, is making his first visit to India.

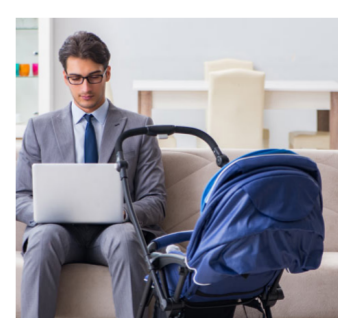
Trump's itinerary starts on February 24. He is expected to be feted by some 110,000 people in Modi's home state of Gujarat when he inaugurates the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel stadium, the world's biggest cricket venue, in a "Namaste Trump" rally.

Men and women to get equal parental leave in Finland

Scandinavian countries like Finland are well-known for their high standards of living. These countries top most development indicators and are usually shown up as a model for progressive governance.

However, one aspect wherein they do suffer is in fertility rates. Finland had a fertility rate of just 1.6 babies per woman in 2016—less than what is required to naturally maintain the population. In 2016, Finland's population increased by just 7,568 people, largely on account of migration.

One way to possibly address this situation is by improving the employee benefits for those who have children. Finland already had some of the highest provisions for maternal and parental leave in the world.



Now, the newly elected government of Sanna Marin, the world's youngest leader of a country, is set to make maternal and paternal leave the same—seven months each for the mother and father of a newborn child.

New parents will be able to avail a total of 14 months from next year when the policy kicks in (expected from September 2021). Single par-

ents will be able to use both allowances.

Earlier, maternal leave was set at 4.2 months while paternal leave was 2.2 months (with the option to share six months between the mother and father).

The earlier policy had not incentivised fathers to take leave, however, as only one in four fathers were estimated to have taken this leave under it.

The move comes ahead of a 2019 directive by the EU, which asked member states to give offer each parent at least four months of leave including two months that cannot be transferred. The EU directive 2019/1158 gave member states three years to enact the new legislation. Interestingly, the legislation noted that only ten per cent of fathers in the EU currently took advantage of parental leave.