

South Sudan condemns faction clashes in Upper Nile

JUBA, WEDNESDAY

The unity government of South Sudan has condemned recent clashes between factions of First Vice President Riek Machar's Sudan People's Army-In-Opposition (SPLA-IO) in the Upper Nile region.

Presidential adviser on security affairs Tut Gatluak Manime said the government would form an ad-hoc committee to investigate the cause of the skirmishes.

"The Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity condemns in the strongest terms possible the Kitwang declaration of SPLA-IO breakaway, led by Generals Simon Gatwech and John Olony that resulted in tension and attacks between the two forces," Gatluak told reporters in Juba.

A fierce battle erupted on August 7 when Machar's rivals declared on August 4 that they had deposed him. (Xinhua)



South Sudanese unified soldiers in training. PHOTO | AFP

Afghan head flies into besieged city as Taliban gains ground

KABUL, WEDNESDAY

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani flew to the besieged northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif on Wednesday to rally his beleaguered forces, with Taliban fighters having now taken more than a quarter of the country's provincial capitals in less than a week.

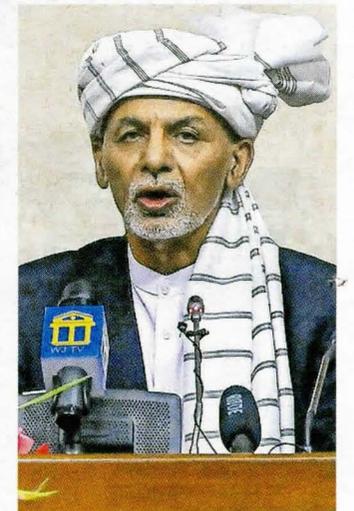
His visit was immediately overshadowed by the mass surrender of hundreds of government soldiers in nearby Kunduz, along with the overnight capture of a provincial capital – the ninth city to be overrun since Friday.

One army officer, who asked not to be named, said they had endured withering mortar fire at Kunduz airport, and were left with no choice but to surrender.

"There was no way to fight back. My unit, with 20 soldiers, three humvees and four pick-up trucks surrendered. We are waiting to get our pardon letter. There is a big queue," he said.

Ghani held talks with local strongman Atta Mohammad Noor and infamous warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum about the defence of the city as Taliban fighters inched closer to its outskirts.

The loss of Mazar is catastrophic to the government and represents the complete collapse of its control over the north. (AFP)



President Ghani addresses MPs on August 2. PHOTO | AFP

Rare unity Businesses hail the vote, saying it provides investments and creates jobs

Victory for Biden as Senate passes infrastructure Bill

Passage looks less certain in the House of Representatives, where rifts have emerged among Democrats

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY

US President Joe Biden hailed the Senate passage on Tuesday of a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package, celebrating a major bipartisan victory on a plan he said would transform America.

By funding work on roads, bridges and ports, as well as clean water and high-speed internet, Biden said the Bill – which still needs House approval – would create thousands of high-paying jobs for people without college degrees.

"This historic investment infrastructure is what I believe you, the American people, want. This Bill shows we can work together," Biden said at the White House.

Seven weeks after the Democratic leader stood with senators from both parties hailing a preliminary agreement, the Bill received rare bipartisan support in Washington's highly-polarised political atmosphere.

Needing just a simple majority, it passed by 69 votes to 30, with backing from a third of Republican Senators.

The measure now faces a make-or-break vote in the House of Representatives in coming weeks, where its future is less certain as divisions have sprung up in the Democratic majority.

Democratic Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer credited Biden for winning approval of "the first major infrastructure package in more than a decade on a bipartisan basis" after just



Turning this promise into reality will grow our economy and strengthen our competitiveness for decades.

Suzanne Clark



seven months in office.

"It's been a long and winding road, but we have persisted," Schumer said.

The ambitious plan provides for \$550 Billion in new federal spending on transport infrastructure, but also for public transit, broadband internet and clean water, as well as electric charging stations and other measures to fight climate change.

The price tag – the equivalent of Spain's 2020 GDP – relies on other public funds already appropriated.

In a deeply divided Washington, the Bill's final approval would mark a re-

Workers repair a road near the White House on August 10. The US Senate has approved Biden's \$1.2 trillion infrastructure investment plan. PHOTO | AFP

sounding win for Biden, a former senator who touts his ability to reach across the aisle.

In a sign of the continued influence wielded by former president Donald Trump, three Republican senators who participated in the negotiations announced they would not support the plan after Trump threatened reprisals for helping to hand Biden a political win.

But top Republican Senator Mitch McConnell voted for it, aware of the programme's popularity among voters tired of historic neglect of the nation's highways.

Passage looks less certain in the House of Representatives, where rifts have emerged within the narrow Democratic majority between the progressive and moderate wings.

Negotiations are likely to be drawn out, and a final vote may not come until the fall.

Businesses applauded the vote, saying it provides investments and creates jobs. US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark called it a "historic investment in our nation's crumbling infrastructure".

"Turning this long-overdue promise into a reality will grow our economy and strengthen our competitiveness for decades to come," Clark said.

According to a recent Business Roundtable study, each dollar of infrastructure investment over 20 years would yield nearly \$4 in the country's economic growth. (AFP)

Russian army, air force to get new and modernised weapons

MOSCOW, WEDNESDAY

More than 60 new and 200 modernised aircraft will be delivered to Russia's air force by the end of the year, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Aerospace Forces Sergei Dronov has said.

"The delivery includes advanced multirole Su-30SM, Su-35S, Su-57 aircraft and Su-34 medium-range fighter-bombers, heavy Il-76MD90A

transport planes, Mi-28NM and Ka-52 combat helicopters and Mi-8AMTSh-VN special operations helicopters," Dronov said in Moscow on Tuesday.

"The equipment has been tested in combat conditions in Syria and necessary adjustments made."

At the same time, the army will receive 20 T-14 Armata tanks by the end of this year, Deputy Defence Minister Alexei Krivoruchko said during the military output acceptance day.

"The troops will also receive 65 T-90M Proryv tanks," he added.

The domestic defence industry is expected to deliver 18 medium-and heavy-class reconnaissance/strike drones to the military while a brigade of the Iskander-M tactical missile system will arrive ahead of schedule.

The Armata is a heavy track standardised platform serving as the basis to develop a main battle

tank, an infantry fighting vehicle, an armoured personnel carrier and some other vehicles.

The T-14 tank, based on the Armata platform, was shown to the public for the first time at Red Square's Victory Day Parade in capital Moscow on May 9, 2015.

The new combat vehicle features fully digitised equipment, an unmanned turret and an isolated armoured capsule for the crew. (Agencies)