

Zimbabwe health minister gets bail over virus kit scam

A Zimbabwe court on Saturday released health minister Obadiah Moyo on bail following his arrest the previous day on allegations of corruption regarding a \$60 million deal to procure COVID-19 tests and equipment. Sitting in Harare, the court's magistrate granted Moyo bail for 50,000 Zimbabwe dollars (\$2,000). Bail was not opposed by prosecutors who are investigating three charges, including an 'abuse of office' charge that carries a maximum sentence of 15 years. Moyo was arrested for his dealings with Drax International LLC and Drax Consult SAGL, companies prosecutors claim were illegally awarded contracts by the health ministry without a competitive tender process. The contracts have since been cancelled by President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government. Zimbabwe has recorded nearly 500 virus cases, including four deaths.

Top US prosecutor who probed Trump's allies fired

A stand-off over the independence of one of the country's most important prosecutor's offices ended on Saturday when Geoffrey Berman agreed to step down as US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, the office that had been investigating President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani. Berman's confirmation of his departure came after Attorney General William Barr told him he had been fired by Trump at Barr's request. Berman's office, which is known for prosecuting the most high profile terrorism cases, Wall Street financial crimes and government corruption, has not shied from taking on figures in Trump's orbit. It oversaw the prosecution of Michael Cohen, Trump's former personal lawyer, indicted two Giuliani associates and launched a probe into Giuliani in connection with his efforts to dig up dirt on Trump's political adversaries in Ukraine. Giuliani has not formally been accused of any wrongdoing.



Participants perform yoga during a live broadcast marking World Yoga Day amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Brussels, Belgium, yesterday. India marked International Yoga Day with low-key events yesterday as the nation battles coronavirus, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the crisis had made the ancient practice even more relevant. PHOTO: REUTERS

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP



A girl observes a partial solar eclipse on the Mahanakhon Skywalk Glass Tray at the King Power Mahanakhon building in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday. Inset, A crowd stands on a roof as a partial solar eclipse is observed in Nairobi, Kenya. Skywatchers along a narrow band from west Africa to the Arabian Peninsula, India and the Far East yesterday witnessed a dramatic 'ring of fire' solar eclipse. Yesterday's eclipse arrived on the northern hemisphere's longest day of the year. PHOTO: REUTERS

INDIA-CHINA BORDER STAND-OFF
US will help to reduce tensions
Says Trump as tensions boil

AGENCIES

The United States is talking to both India and China to help them resolve their ongoing border tensions, President Donald Trump said on Saturday.

"It's a very tough situation. We're talking to India. We're talking to China. They've got a big problem there," Trump told reporters at the White House before boarding Marine 1 on his way to his first post-COVID-19 election rally in Oklahoma.

"They've come to blows, and we'll see what happens. We'll try and help them out," Trump said when asked about his assessment of the situation between India and China.

Over the past few days, the entire Trump Administration has rallied behind India.

On Saturday, VK Singh, the Indian minister for roads and transport, told TV News24 in an interview that China lost at least 40 soldiers.

China has not said anything about any losses in the hand-to-hand combat that took place in the heavily contested Galwan Valley in the western Himalayas, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed and at least 76 injured.

The nuclear-armed Asian neighbours traded accusations on Saturday that the other had violated their shared de facto border, an area that this week became the site of their deadliest clash in half a century.

Troops remain locked in a face-off at several locations along the poorly defined Line of Actual Control, despite talks between local commanders to de-escalate.

Internet blackout in Rakhine enters 2nd year

AFP, Yangon

The internet shutdown in Myanmar's conflict-ridden northwest, described by rights groups as the world's longest, entered a second year Sunday with locals and campaigners appealing for an end to the blackout as coronavirus fears grip the region.

The Myanmar military has been embroiled in a bloody civil war since January 2019 against the Arakan Army (AA), an insurgent group fighting for more autonomy for ethnic Rakhine Buddhists.

The government shut down mobile data in several townships across Rakhine state and neighbouring Chin state on June 21 last year, causing panic among residents desperate for information about the unrest.

Human Rights Watch had called on Friday for an immediate end to "the world's longest government-enforced internet shutdown".

"It's critical for civilians to get the information needed to stay safe" during a global pandemic, said HRW's Linda Lakhdhir.

The country has so far recorded 287 coronavirus cases including six deaths, but experts fear the low numbers are due to a lack of testing.

A government official said earlier this month the internet shutdown would continue until at least August 1 in eight townships.

The conflict has displaced tens of thousands of civilians and seen hundreds injured and scores killed, with both the military and the AA trading allegations of abuses.

Few in Myanmar have personal computers, with the majority relying on mobile phones to access the internet for communications and information -- making those under the blackout especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

DEADLY STABBING SPREE

Britain opens 'terror' probe

'Libyan man' arrested after 3 killed at park filled with families

AFP, Reading

British police yesterday said they were treating a stabbing spree in which a lone assailant killed three people in a park filled with families and friends in the southern English city of Reading as a "terrorism incident".

The Thames Valley police said three people were also seriously injured and they had detained a 25-year-old suspect from the historic town 60 kilometres (35 miles) west of London.

They made no reference to reports that the man was a Libyan national.

Footage showed what appeared to be a large number of counter-terror police performing a controlled explosion at a residence where the suspect is believed to have lived shortly after the Saturday evening attack.

"Counter Terrorism Policing can now confirm that the stabbing incident that happened in Reading



Forbury Gardens

last night, has now been declared a terrorist incident," police said in a statement. The counter-terror police "will be taking over the investigation," said the statement.

Downing Street said Prime Minister Boris Johnson was briefed about the incident by security officials and senior ministers yesterday morning.

The Conservative leader condemned the "appalling incident" and top politicians expressed sympathies for those hurt at Forbury Gardens -- a popular park situated next to the ruins

of the 12th-century Reading Abbey.

Witnesses reported seeing two air ambulances and several police cars rush to the park on Saturday evening.

One witness described a lone assailant walking through a park filled with people relaxing on the grass and stabbing them at random.

"The park was pretty full. A lot of people sat around drinking with friends," Lawrence Wort told the Press Association.

"One lone person walked though, suddenly shouted some unintelligible words and went around a large group of around 10, trying to stab them."

Wort said he saw three people being stabbed "in the neck and under the arms". The assailant then lunged at another group and "got one person in the back of the neck", Wort said.

Officials said two people were being treated in the emergency department of Reading's Berkshire Hospital.



LIBYA CHAOS

Egypt's Sisi threatens to intervene

REUTERS, Cairo

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Saturday said his country has a legitimate right to intervene in neighbouring Libya and ordered his army to be ready to carry out any mission outside the country, if necessary.

Sisi's comments came amid high tensions over regional rival Turkey's intervention in Libya. He also warned forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli not to cross the current frontline with Khalifa Haftar's eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA).

Turkey's support for the GNA has reversed a 14-month assault on Tripoli by forces loyal to Haftar, which are backed by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

"Any direct intervention from the Egyptian state has now acquired international legitimacy," Sisi told an audience after inspecting military units at an air base near the border with Libya. He said Egypt has the right to defend itself after receiving "direct threats" from "terrorist militias and mercenaries" supported by foreign countries.

Before his speech, Sisi addressed several air force pilots and special forces personnel at the base, telling them: "Be prepared to carry out any mission, here inside our borders - or if necessary, outside our borders."

The UAE and Saudi Arabia expressed support for Egypt's desire to protect its security and borders.

Modi's clarification puzzles more

Indian PM's remarks on Chinese incursion on the border stoke debate, controversy

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement that India has not ceded any territory or faced intrusions from China has triggered an intense debate within India amid concerns it could weaken India's negotiating position with China.

It also led to a clarification from the Prime Minister's Office.

At a meeting with opposition leaders to explain the circumstances leading up to the violent face off on June 15 in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were killed, Modi said no one had entered Indian territory or captured Indian military posts.

His remarks came two days after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had told his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, in a telephone conversation that Chinese troops had tried to put up a structure in Galwan valley on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between the two countries.

Amid the seemingly contradictory statements, the PMO in its clarification accused "some quarters" of "a mischievous interpretation." "As regards transgression of LAC, it was clearly stated that the violence in Galwan on 15 June arose because Chinese side was seeking to erect structures just across the LAC and refused to desist from



such actions," said the statement from the PMO. "The Prime Minister's observations that there was no Chinese presence on our side of the LAC pertained to the situation as a consequence of the bravery of our armed forces."

Still the mixed messaging from the government triggered many more questions than it answered.

"This is an ill-considered comment from the Prime Minister. It seriously undermines India's negotiated position on the Line of Control and the territorial dispute itself," said Indian journalist and a retired Colonel of Indian Army Ajai Shukla.

Brahma Chellaney, an Indian geostrategist, tweeted: "How Modi's speech has become a Chinese propaganda coup: New Delhi has released one clarification, but it won't be the last. Undoing the damage will not be easy. The Chinese, of course, are celebrating. They have translated Modi's key words into Mandarin."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian in a series of tweets on Saturday accused India of building fortification & barricades "on Chinese territory in Galwan in May, roads, bridges and other facilities at the LAC in Galwan Valley" in April and on June 15 of "violently" attacking



Cobain guitar sells for \$6m

AFP, Los Angeles

The guitar that grunge rock icon Kurt Cobain played during his legendary 1993 MTV Unplugged performance sold Saturday for a record \$6 million.

The retro acoustic-electric 1959 Martin D-18E that Cobain strummed for Nirvana's career-defining performance in New York -- just five months before his suicide at age 27 -- sold after a bidding war to Peter Freedman, founder of RODE Microphones, Julien's Auctions said.

The guitar was sold with its case, which Cobain had decorated with a flyer from punk rock band Poison Idea's 1990 album "Feel the Darkness."

Until now, the most expensive guitar in history was a Fender Stratocaster, dubbed "Black Strat," used by Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour. It had been sold by the musician for nearly \$4 million during a charity sale in June 2019.

'Slow down' COVID-19 testing: Trump

AFP, Tulsa

US President Donald Trump said Saturday he was encouraging health officials in his administration to slow down coronavirus testing, arguing that increased tests lead to more cases being discovered.

At his first rally since the outbreak forced nationwide shutdowns in March, Trump told the crowd in Tulsa, Oklahoma that testing was a "double-edged sword."

The US -- which has more deaths and cases than any other country -- has carried out more than 25 million tests, placing it outside the top 20 countries in the world, per capita.

"Here is the bad part: When you do testing to that extent, you are going to find more people, you will find more cases," Trump argued. "So I said to my people 'slow the testing down.' They test and they test."

It was not clear from Trump's tone if he was playing to the crowd, who cheered as he spoke, or if he was being serious. However, a White House official told AFP that Trump "was clearly speaking in jest to call out the media's absurd coverage. We are leading the world in testing, and we are proud to have conducted 25 million plus tests."



Alcoholic monkey gets life term

THE STATESMAN/ANN

The Kanpur zoo in India has a monkey which will remain behind the bars for all its life.

The monkey, named 'Kalua', is a native of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh. He has bitten over 250 persons in Mirzapur, of whom one died.

According to the reports, Kalua was a pet monkey of a local occultist who would regularly give him liquor to drink. Over a period of time, the monkey became alcoholic and when the occultist died, Kalua stopped getting liquor and became aggressive. As he went on a biting spree and created terror, Kalua was caught and brought to the Kanpur zoo.

"There has been no change in his behaviour and he remains as aggressive as he was. It has been three years since he was brought here, but now it has been decided that he will remain in captivity all his life," said the zoo doctor Mohd Nasir.

NEWS IN brief

Indian forces kill 3 militants in J&K

AFP, Srinagar

Three militants have been killed in a shootout with Indian government forces in the heart of the restive Kashmir's main city of Srinagar, police said yesterday, two days after eight rebels died in another gun battle. New Delhi has been stepping up counter-insurgency efforts in the disputed territory since the nationwide coronavirus lockdown was imposed in late March.

Trump's bid fails to block Bolton's book

REUTERS, Washington

A US judge denied on Saturday a request by the Trump administration for an injunction to block publication of a book by Donald Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton that alleges the president sought China's help to win re-election. "While Bolton's unilateral conduct raises grave national security concerns, the government has not established that an injunction is an appropriate remedy," the judge said in his ruling. "The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir" is scheduled to hit store shelves on Tuesday.

215 bodies found in Mexico mass graves

AFP, Guadalajara

At least 215 bodies were found between January and May in nine mass graves near Guadalajara, in Mexico's Jalisco state. Since President Felipe Calderon in 2006 launched a controversial military crackdown on organized crime, there have been more than 287,000 murders in the country, though it is not clear how many cases are linked to fighting due to organized crime.