

Dozens killed in IS, regime clashes in Syria: monitor

Clashes between Russia-backed Syrian regime forces and the Islamic State group have killed more than 50 fighters on both sides in two days, a Britain-based war monitor said on Saturday. Fighting and Russian air strikes in the central desert province of Homs since late Thursday have claimed the lives of 20 pro-government fighters and 31 jihadists, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. IS jihadists have retained a roving presence in Syria's vast Badia desert, despite losing their last shred of territory last year. They regularly carry out attacks there. IS declared a cross-border "caliphate" in large parts of Syria and neighbouring Iraq in 2014, but several military campaigns against it chipped away at that proto-state and eventually led to its territorial demise.

23 killed, 29 injured in lightning strikes in UP

At least 23 people were killed and 29 others injured after being struck by lightning in various districts of India's Uttar Pradesh on Saturday. According to an official statement, eight people died in Allahabad, six in Mirzapur, two in Kaushambi, and one in Jaunpur. A report from the Relief Commissioner's Office said that nine others in Prayagraj, 10 in Mirzapur, and four in Kaushambi suffered serious burns. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed deep anguish over the loss of lives and directed respective district magistrates to extend compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the family of those killed. He also asked the officials to ensure that proper medical treatment is provided to the injured, the statement said.

India to reopen Taj Mahal with social distancing, masks



Visitors to the Taj Mahal will have to wear masks at all times, keep their distance and not touch its glistening marble surfaces when India's 17th-century monument to love reopens today after a three-month COVID-19 shutdown. Only 5,000 tourists will be allowed in a day, split into two groups, a far cry from peak levels of 80,000 a day who would swarm the mausoleum built in the northern city of Agra by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his wife, in a 22-year effort. Authorities are reopening the Taj and other monuments, such as New Delhi's historic Red Fort, just as India's coronavirus infections are rising at the fastest pace in three months. Yesterday, the health ministry reported a record single-day spike of 24,850 new cases and more than 600 deaths, pushing the overall case tally to 673,165, closing in on Russia, the third-most affected country globally.

SOURCE: ANN, REUTERS, AFP



Local residents are rescued by Japanese Self-Defence Force soldiers using a boat at a flooding area caused by a heavy rain in Kuma village, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan, yesterday. The death toll from floods and landslides unleashed by torrential rains on Japan's southern island of Kyushu rose to 20 yesterday, with 14 people missing, NHK public TV said. More heavy rain is forecast after Saturday's deadly deluge in the Kumamoto prefecture, Japan's worst natural disaster since Typhoon Hagibis in October last year left about 90 people dead.

PHOTO: AFP

FLOODS IN ASSAM

Death toll rises to 61; 1.1m affected

AGENCIES

More than a million people have been affected by flooding in northeastern India, where the death toll rose to 61, authorities said yesterday.

Flooding is an annual phenomenon in India's northeast, claiming hundreds of lives each year.

The flood has affected 10.75 lakh people in 18 districts of Assam, a government report said. Of the dead, 37 people were killed in the flood and 24 died due to landslides triggered by incessant rainfall, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said in its daily report.

The Brahmaputra River, one of the largest rivers in the world which flows from Tibet into India and then into Bangladesh, burst its banks in Assam last week, inundating more than 2,000 villages. The river is flowing above the danger mark at Neamatighat in Jorhat and Dhubri town in Dhubri districts, reports said yesterday.

The state was first hit in mid-May when pre-monsoon rains arrived, causing floods that killed 11 people. Another 20 died in landslides caused by days of incessant downpours.

The floodwaters receded after a few weeks, only to rise again on June 22 at the start of the annual monsoon season.

About 70 percent of Assam's World Heritage-listed Kaziranga National Park -- home to two-thirds of the world's remaining one-horned rhinos -- was submerged by the floods.

The monsoon is crucial to replenishing water supplies in South Asia, but also causes widespread death and destruction across the region each year.

The coronavirus is airborne

239 experts come up with one big claim, urge WHO to change its advisory

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

The coronavirus is finding new victims worldwide, in bars and restaurants, offices, markets and casinos, giving rise to frightening clusters of infection that increasingly confirm what many scientists have been saying for months: The virus lingers in the air indoors, infecting those nearby.

If airborne transmission is a significant factor in the pandemic, especially in crowded spaces with poor ventilation, the consequences for containment will be significant. Masks may be needed indoors, even in socially distant settings.

Healthcare workers may need N95 masks that filter out even the smallest respiratory droplets as they care for coronavirus patients.

Ventilation systems in schools, nursing homes, residences and businesses may need to minimise recirculating air and add powerful new filters. Ultraviolet lights may be needed to kill viral particles floating in tiny droplets indoors.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has long held that the coronavirus is spread primarily by large respiratory droplets that, once expelled by infected people in coughs and sneezes, fall quickly to the floor.

But in an open letter to the WHO, 239 scientists in 32 countries have outlined the evidence showing that smaller particles can infect people and are calling for the

agency to revise its recommendations. The researchers plan to publish their letter in a scientific journal.

Even in its latest update on the coronavirus, released June 29, the WHO said airborne transmission of the virus is possible only after medical procedures that produce aerosols, or droplets smaller than 5 microns. (A micron is equal to 1 millionth of a metre.)

Proper ventilation and N95 masks are of concern only in those circumstances, according to the WHO.

Instead, its infection control guidance, before and during this pandemic, has heavily promoted the importance of handwashing as a primary prevention strategy, even though there is limited evidence for transmission of the virus from surfaces. (The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention now says surfaces are likely to play only a minor role.)

But interviews with nearly 20 scientists - including a dozen WHO consultants and several members of the committee that crafted the guidance - and internal e-mails paint a picture of an organisation that, despite good intentions, is out of step with science.

Whether carried aloft by large droplets that zoom through the air after a sneeze, or by much smaller exhaled droplets that may glide the length of a room, these experts said, the coronavirus is borne through air and can infect people when inhaled.

"We've known since 1946 that coughing and talking generate aerosols," said Dr Linsey Marr, an expert in

airborne transmission of viruses at Virginia Tech. Scientists have not been able to grow the coronavirus from aerosols in the lab. But that doesn't mean aerosols are not infective, Dr Marr said: Most of the samples in those experiments have come from hospital rooms with good air flow that would dilute viral levels.

In most buildings, she said, "the air-exchange rate is usually much lower, allowing virus to accumulate in the air and pose a greater risk."

Many experts said the WHO should embrace what some called a "precautionary principle" and others called "needs and values" - the idea that even without definitive evidence, the agency should assume the worst of the virus, apply common sense and recommend the best protection possible.

"There is no incontrovertible proof that Sars-CoV-2 travels or is transmitted significantly by aerosols, but there is absolutely no evidence that it's not," said Dr Trish Greenhalgh, a primary care doctor at the University of Oxford in Britain.

"So at the moment we have to make a decision in the face of uncertainty, and my goodness, it's going to be a disastrous decision if we get it wrong," she said. "So why not just mask up for a few weeks, just in case?" Even cloth masks, if worn by everyone, can significantly reduce transmission, and the WHO should say so clearly, Dr Don Milton, an aerosol expert at the University of Maryland.

Rapper eyes US presidency

REUTERS, Washington

American rapper Kanye West, a vocal supporter of US President Donald Trump, announced on Saturday that he would run for president in 2020.

"We must now realize the promise of America by trusting God, unifying our vision and building our future. I am running for president of the United States," West wrote in a Twitter post, adding an American flag emoji and the hashtag "#2020VISION".

It was not immediately clear if West was serious about vying for the presidency four months before the Nov 3 election or if he had filed any official paperwork to appear on state election ballots.

Tesla chief Elon Musk, endorsed West's Twitter post: "You have my full support!" he wrote.



A car tries to drive along a street filled with revellers drinking in the Soho area of London on Saturday, after the police re-opened the road at 2300 as restrictions are further eased during the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Pubs in England reopened on Saturday for the first time since late March, bringing cheer to drinkers and the industry but raising fears of public disorder and fresh coronavirus cases.

PHOTO: AFP

'Radical left' lying about past

In 4th July speech, Trump vows to defeat those who are trying to erase history; says '99 percent' coronavirus cases in US 'totally harmless'

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Saturday vowed to defeat the "radical left" in an Independence Day speech at the White House that condemned recent protests against monuments to historical figures as attempts to destroy the United States.

Trump claimed without evidence that 99% of coronavirus cases in the United States were "totally harmless." In fact, many states marked a record number of new COVID-19 cases. In Texas alone, 7,890 patients were hospitalized after 238 new admissions over the past 24 hours.

Trump, who has faced criticism over his handling of the pandemic, said China must be "held accountable" for failing to contain the disease.

The administration held a fireworks display over the National Mall as night fell after Trump's speech, despite Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser's warnings that the mass spectator event would defy health officials' guidance during the pandemic.



Just steps from where Trump spoke, peaceful protesters marched down blocked-off streets around the White House, Black Lives Matter Plaza and the Lincoln Memorial. They were confronted by counter-protesters chanting, "USA! USA!" but there were no reports of violence.

Millions of Americans have been demonstrating against police brutality and racial inequality since the May 25 killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. In addition to achieving police reforms

in some cities, some protesters have removed Confederate statues and other symbols of America's legacy of slavery.

"There have always been those who seek to lie about the past in order to gain power in the present, those that are lying about our history, those who want us to be ashamed of who we are," Trump said on Saturday. "Their goal is demolition."

Trump's Fourth of July remarks doubled down on his speech the previous evening at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota where he accused "angry mobs" of trying to erase history and painted himself as a bulwark against left-wing extremism.

Just months before November's presidential election, opinion polls in key states show Trump trailing his Democratic rival, former Vice President Joe Biden. Biden wrote a Fourth of July opinion piece that struck a contrasting note with the Republican president and accused him of finding "new ways to tarnish and dismantle our democracy" every day.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh		
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change		
Bangladesh Climate Change Trust		
Old 'Ban Bhaban (6th Floor)-101, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212		
Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)		
1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.	
2. Agency	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT).	
3. Procuring entity name	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT).	
4. Procuring entity code	None.	
5. Procuring entity district	Dhaka.	
6. Invitation for	Hiring of Consultants for delivering expert services to the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust for being National Implementing Entity (NIE) to access Green Climate Fund.	
7. Invitation Ref. No.	22.06.0000.120.14.001-2018	
8. Date	30th June 2020	
9. Budget & source of funds	BCCT Knowledge Hub Project (GoB).	
10. Development partners (if applicable)	None.	
11. Project/program code (if applicable)	None.	
12. Project/program name (if applicable)	Institutionalization of BCCT as a Centre of Excellence through Coordination of Climate Finance, Research and Knowledge Management.	
13. EOI Package Nos.	S1 (Procurement of Service).	
14. EOI package name	Selection Consultants.	
15. Procurement method	OCBS (Quality and Cost Base Selection).	
16. EOI publication date	10th July 2020, 03.00pm.	
17. EOI submission closing date & time	2nd August 2020, 03.00pm.	
18. EOI opening date & time	2nd August 2020, 03.00pm.	
19. EOI submission place	Old 'Ban Bhaban-101 (6th Floor), Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.	
20. Brief description of assignment	Considering the demands of the accreditation process, Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT under MoEFCC) requires the services of consultants who are familiar with environmental, climate change, gender and development issues and have an understanding and experience of the funding landscape for Climate Change related activities and of the workings of the Green Climate Fund. The consultant's main responsibility would be (1) to study the requirements of the accreditation process, assess BCCT's readiness and advice on adequate steps, produce as well as any additional required policies for being National Implementing Entity (NIE). (2) A unique and coordinated work-plan prepare for BCCT considering its dynamic activities.	
21. Qualification & experience of the consultants	<p>Demonstrated minimum 10 years of experience in the field of Environmental/Climate Change and/or Social sustainability and assessment in a national and international development context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum master's degree in field related to Development Studies, Economics, Environmental and/or Social Science, Finance, Environmental Politics, International Relations, Geography and Environment, Agriculture, Climate Change and others related subjects/studies. Familiarity with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and its procedures relating to Accreditation of Implementing Entities. Excellent communication and drafting skills in English. Ability to work with limited supervision, self-motivated, objective-oriented. <p>The details will be available in ToR.</p>	
22. Other information	<p>1) Consultants will be selected in accordance with the Public Procurement Act 2006 & Public Procurement Rules 2008.</p> <p>2) Interested persons may obtain detail ToR & further information (if required) from the office of undersigned from 9.00am to 4.00pm (except holidays).</p> <p>3) Envelope containing one original with one copy application/proposals (EOI) along with relevant supporting documents to be marked "Expression of Interest (EOI) for Selection of Consultants".</p> <p>4) Late submission will be rejected.</p>	
23. Name of official inviting EOI	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT).	
24. Designation of official EOI	Director, Development, Planning & Negotiation and Project Director.	
25. Address of official EOI	Old 'Ban Bhaban-101 (6th Floor), Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.	
26. Contact details of official inviting tender	Ph: 01716414659 E-mail: nasir6318@gmail.com	
27. The EOI will be available in the website of Bangladesh Climate Change Trust.		
28. The authority reserves all rights to accept or reject any/all EOIs without assigning any reason thereof.		
<p>Nasir-ud-Doula Director (Deputy Secretary) Planning, Development & Negotiation, BCCT and Project Director</p>		
GD-1080		