

China opens security agency HQ in Hong Kong

China yesterday opened a new office for its intelligence agents to operate openly in Hong Kong for the first time under a tough new security law, transforming a hotel into the force's headquarters. The new base is a hotel overlooking the city's Victoria Park, a location that has hosted pro-democracy protests for years, including an annual vigil each June marking Beijing's deadly Tiananmen crackdown. A plaque bearing the security agency's name was unveiled early yesterday in front of Hong Kong government and police officials, an AFP reporter on the scene said. A Chinese flag was unfurled on a pole erected outside the building while a plaque bearing the emblem of the People's Republic of China went up overnight. Beijing imposed a new security law on Hong Kong last week targeting acts of subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion. Similar national security laws are used to crush dissent on the mainland and police in Hong Kong have already made arrests for people voicing certain political views now deemed illegal, such as advocating independence or autonomy.

UK to resume Saudi arms sales a day after sanctions

Britain said it would resume arms sales to Saudi Arabia, halted last year after a UK court ruling over the Gulf kingdom's bombing campaign in neighbouring Yemen. Weapons exports were stopped in June 2019 after the Court of Appeal ordered the government to clarify how it assesses whether their use in Yemen's civil war breaches international humanitarian law (IHL). The conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and triggered what the United Nations has described as the world's worst existing humanitarian crisis. The announcement came just a day after Britain slapped sanctions on 20 Saudis for their suspected roles in the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Government figures analysed by CAAT show that Britain had licensed nearly £5 billion (\$6.4 billion) in weapons to the kingdom since its Yemen campaign began in 2015.

Indian govt panel to coordinate probe into Gandhi family trusts

Indian Ministry of Home Affairs has set up a panel to coordinate tax violation and money laundering investigations against three Gandhi family trusts including the controversial Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF). The ministry yesterday informed that it has constituted an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate investigations into violation of various legal provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), Income Tax Act and Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) by Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust and Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust. The Centre's move follows recent allegations launched by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the Congress and the Gandhi family claiming that China had funded the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. According to some estimates, the donation was to the tune of \$2 million between 2004 and 2006 and \$9 million between 2006 and 2013.

SOURCE: ANN, REUTERS, AFP



A man looks for his belongings at his damaged house after floods caused by torrential rain, in Kumamura, Kumamoto Prefecture, southwestern Japan, yesterday. Torrential rain pounded central Japan yesterday as authorities said 61 people were feared dead in days of heavy downpours that have triggered devastating landslides and terrifying floods. PHOTO: REUTERS

Look out for brain damages

Scientists warn of potential wave of Covid-linked severe neurological complications in recovered patients; UN warns over faulty PPE, medicines

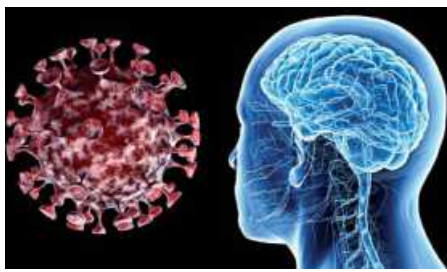
REUTERS, London

Scientists yesterday warned of a potential wave of coronavirus-related brain damage as new evidence suggested COVID-19 can lead to severe neurological complications, including inflammation, psychosis and delirium.

A study by researchers at University College London (UCL) described 43 cases of patients with COVID-19 who suffered either temporary brain dysfunction, strokes, nerve damage or other serious brain effects.

The research adds to recent studies which also found the disease can damage the brain. "Whether we will see an epidemic on a large scale of brain damage linked to the pandemic - perhaps similar to the encephalitis lethargica outbreak in the 1920s and 1930s after the 1918 influenza pandemic - remains to be seen," said Michael Zandi, from UCL's Institute of Neurology, who co-led the study.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, is largely a respiratory illness



that affects the lungs, but neuroscientists and specialist brain doctors say emerging evidence of its impact on the brain is concerning.

"My worry is that we have millions of people with COVID-19 now. And if in a year's time we have 10 million recovered people, and those people have cognitive deficits ... then that's going to affect their ability to work and their ability to go about activities of daily living," Adrian Owen, a neuroscientist at Western University in Canada, told Reuters in an interview.

In the UCL study, published in the

journal Brain, nine patients who had brain inflammation were diagnosed with a rare condition called acute disseminated encephalomyelitis (ADEM) which is more usually seen in children and can be triggered by viral infections. The team said they saw a alarming increase in ADEM cases.

"Given that the disease has only been around for a matter of months, we might not yet know what long-term damage COVID-19 can cause," said Ross Paterson, who co-led the study. "Doctors need to be aware of possible neurological effects, as early diagnosis can improve patient outcomes."

Meanwhile, a UN report yesterday said that a rush by countries to buy personal protective equipment during the pandemic has created an opportunity for criminal groups, which are peddling sub-standard equipment and likely to move on to medicines soon.

Criminals have adapted quickly, also running scams where no equipment is supplied at all, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in the report.

'Sociopath' father shaped 'narcissist' Donald Trump

Niece says in her book; White House rubbishes her claims

AFP, New York

Donald Trump's niece describes the US president as a lying narcissist who was shaped by his domineering father, according to excerpts of her memoir published Tuesday.

The White House immediately hit back, describing Mary Trump's "Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man" as "a book of falsehoods."

The memoir is due out on July 14 amid a legal battle to stop its publication and is already a best-seller on Amazon. Mary, a clinical psychologist, writes that Trump saw "cheating as a way of life," according to The New York Times.

She accuses Trump of "hubris and willful ignorance" stretching back to his younger days.

She alleges that the future US leader paid someone else to take the SAT pre-collegiate exam, helping him get into the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton business school.

The Times doesn't explain how she knew. "The absurd SAT allegation is completely false," said deputy White House press secretary Sarah Matthews.

The 240-page book says Trump is a product of his "sociopath" father Fred Trump who created an abusive and traumatic home life, The Washington Post reported.

Mary Trump says Trump paid proxy to take college entrance exam for him

Book says 'willful ignorant' Trump saw 'cheating as a way of life'



The memoir is billed as the first unflattering portrayal of Trump by a family insider.

Mary is the daughter of Fred Trump Jr, Trump's older brother, who died in 1981 from complications related to alcoholism.

Foreign policy experts have spent years trying to nail down just what might be the 45th commander in chief's guiding philosophy or set of principles.

Mary Trump writes that one of his sisters once said this: "He has no principles. None!"

His niece writes that Trump shows all the signs of having a narcissistic personality.

"The fact is, Donald's pathologies are so complex and his behaviours so often inexplicable that coming up with an accurate and comprehensive diagnosis would require a full battery of psychological and neurophysical tests that he'll never sit for," she claims.

The book is set to be the latest bombshell book to dish dirt on Trump after former aide John Bolton's tome, which describes the Republican leader as corrupt and incompetent, hit shelves last month.

Trump has described that book as "fiction."



Uighurs urge ICC to probe 'genocide'

AFP, The Hague

Exiled Uighurs have urged the International Criminal Court to investigate China for genocide and crimes against humanity, filing a huge dossier of evidence with the Hague-based court to back their case.

The evidence handed to the ICC's prosecutor accuses China of locking more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in re-education camps and of forcibly sterilising women.

China has called the accusations baseless and says the facilities in the northwestern Xinjiang region are job training centres aimed at steering people away from terrorism.

China is not an ICC member but lawyers for the Uighurs said the court could follow the example of its ongoing probe into the treatment of Rohingya Muslims by Myanmar, which is also not party to the tribunal. ICC judges ruled in 2018 that the Rohingya investigation could go ahead because the situation in Myanmar affects people in neighbouring Bangladesh, which is an ICC member.

The evidence filed with the court showed that China was guilty of "harsh repressive measures" which include murders, disappearances, torture, and harrowing accounts of sterilisations and birth control measures.

The dossier includes a list of senior Chinese Communist Party members who are allegedly responsible for the treatment of the Uighurs including President Xi Jinping.

AIR RAIDS AND INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS IN CHIN STATE AND RAKHINE

Amnesty decries 'war crimes'

Says UN Security Council 'must act', demands ICC investigation

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Myanmar's military has killed civilians, including children, in indiscriminate air attacks amid worsening conflict in the country's western Rakhine and Chin states, a prominent rights group has said, urging the United Nations Security Council to launch a war crimes investigation.

In a new report yesterday, Amnesty International said it collected new evidence showing Myanmar's military - also known as the Tatmadaw - bombed several villages in Chin state in March and April, killing more than a dozen people.

One witness who was interviewed remotely told the group that an air raid in Paletwa Township on March 14 and 15 killed his uncle, his brother and his brother's 16-year-old friend.

Two people from another family in the same village cluster said nine people, including a seven-year-old boy, were also killed in the bombardment.



"Our family is destroyed," the boy's father told Amnesty.

In another round of aerial raids in Paletwa, a town near Bangladesh border, on April 7, seven people were killed and eight wounded, the report said, citing testimony from a farmer.

The indiscriminate attacks, which Amnesty said amounted to war crimes due to civilian deaths, came amid a surge in fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army (AA), an armed group seeking greater autonomy for the Buddhist Rakhine people who make up most of the state's population. Rakhine is also

home to the mostly Muslim Rohingya, and borders Chin state, whose people are mostly Christian.

"While Myanmar authorities were urging people to stay at home to help stop COVID-19, in Rakhine and Chin states its military was burning down homes and killing civilians in indiscriminate attacks that amount to war crimes," said Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Regional Director.

He called on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for prosecution.

"The reliance on air strikes and internet blackouts may be new, but one constant is the military's remorseless neglect for civilian life," Bequelin said, adding: "This relentless pattern of violations is clearly a matter for the ICC. The Security Council must act."

There was no immediate comment from Myanmar's government.

Ties on the cards

Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan warn Israel over West Bank annexation plan

AFP, Berlin

The foreign ministers of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan on Tuesday urged Israel to abandon plans to begin annexing settlements in the West Bank, warning such action could have "consequences" for relations.

"We concur that any annexation of Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 would be a violation of international law and imperil the foundations of the peace process," the ministers said in a statement after a joint video conference.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had set July 1 as the date when it could begin to annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank as well as the strategic Jordan Valley.

The move was endorsed by a Middle East plan unveiled by US President Donald Trump in January.

Netanyahu's office made no announcement on July 1 as expected, but said talks were continuing with US officials and Israeli security chiefs.

"We would not recognise any changes to the 1967 borders that are not agreed by

both parties in the conflict," the ministers warned in the statement issued by the German foreign ministry.

"We also concur that such a step would have serious consequences for the security and stability of the region, and would constitute a major obstacle to efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and just peace," they said.

"It could also have consequences for the relationship with Israel," they added, underlining their commitment to a two-state solution based on international law.

The EU has in recent weeks mounted a diplomatic campaign against annexation, highlighted by a visit to Jerusalem by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to raise concern about the prospective plans.

But the bloc cannot threaten Israel with formal sanctions without unanimous support among members.

After occupying the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel began establishing a network of settlements the following decade. Construction continues to this day.

Despite being viewed as illegal under international law, the settler population has jumped by 50 percent over the past decade.

DROP OF SECULARISM, DEMOCRACY FROM CURRICULUM

Mamata 'shocked', Shashi Tharoor sees evil design

NDTV ONLINE

India's West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has said she is "shocked" by the centre's decision to drop subjects like democratic rights, federalism and secularism from the Economics and Political Science syllabuses of Classes 9 to 12 in all CBSE-affiliated schools.

Banerjee said she "strongly object(ed)" to the move, which was announced Tuesday by the education ministry on account of the "extraordinary situation in India" - a reference to the COVID-19 pandemic that has seen schools shut for over two months.

"Shocked to know that the central government has dropped topics like citizenship, federalism, secularism and partition in the name of reducing CBSE course during the COVID-19 crisis," Mamata Banerjee tweeted Wednesday.

"We strongly object to this and appeal to the HRD Ministry, Government of India, to ensure these vital lessons aren't curtailed at any cost," the Chief Minister said.

On Tuesday the CBSE (central board for secondary education) said it would

reduce students' workload in light of the lockdown. Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal said, "It has been decided to rationalise syllabus up to 30 per cent by retaining the core concepts".

This reduction in syllabus is applicable for the entire 2020-21 academic year, the government said.

"Core concepts", it transpired, did not include like "secularism" and "federalism" for Class 11; "environment and natural resources" and "social movements" for Class 12; and "democracy and diversity" and "caste, religion and gender" for Class 10. Class 9 students will not be taught from chapters on "democratic rights" and one on "food security" has been deleted as well.

Mamata Banerjee isn't the only opposition leader to criticise the exclusion of such topics from the syllabus of young Indians who, as Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, are "on the cusp of becoming voters".

Tharoor tweeted: "One has to doubt the motives of those who selected the topics to drop. Have they decided democracy, diversity, secularism and 'the like are more dispensable concepts for tomorrow's Indian citizens?'"



Hearts painted by a team of artists from Upfest are seen in the grass at Queen Square, following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Bristol, Britain yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS