

Envelope with ‘ricin’ sent to White House: reports

US authorities have intercepted an envelope addressed to US President Donald Trump that contained a substance identified as the poison ricin, US media reported Saturday. The letter was discovered earlier this week and did not reach the White House, according to the New York Times and CNN. The Times said it was believed that the letter was mailed from Canada. Mail addressed to the White House is first inspected and sorted in depots just outside Washington. Ricin, which is produced by processing castor beans, is lethal even in minute doses if swallowed, inhaled or injected, causing organ failure. It has no known antidote.

Afghan airstrikes kill ‘12 civilians, 40 Taliban fighters’

At least 12 civilians were killed and more than 10 others injured on Saturday in twin airstrikes on a Taliban base in the northeastern Afghan province of Kunduz, a provincial official said. Defence ministry officials in Kabul, who said more than 40 Taliban fighters had been killed in the strikes, did not confirm any civilian casualties. They said an investigation was underway into the incident which comes as the warring sides hold peace talks. The Taliban issued a statement accusing Afghan forces of killing at least 40 civilians in the airstrikes. The headline militant group did not comment on casualties among their fighters.

Prosecute ‘war criminal’ Maduro: Colombia president

Colombia’s President Ivan Duque called Saturday for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to be prosecuted as a “war criminal” in a joint news conference with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Duque spoke as Pompeo rounded off a three-day tour of Venezuela’s neighbors designed to increase pressure on the socialist leader to leave power. Duque, a key US ally in the region, said a UN report this week showed “that this is a regime behind violations of human rights that are systematic, and that the head of this dictatorship is a war criminal and the international community must put an end to the situation.” The 411-page UN Human Rights Council report accused Maduro and his inner circle of being responsible for probable crimes against humanity. Caracas dismissed the report as “riddled with falsehoods.”

Taiwan president says drills show China threat to region

Two days of Chinese military aircraft approaching Taiwan demonstrate that Beijing is a threat to the entire region and have shown Taiwanese even more clearly the true nature of China’s government, President Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday. Multiple Chinese aircraft flew across the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait and into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone on Friday and Saturday, causing Taiwan to scramble jets to intercept. China claims Taiwan as its own territory. The exercises took place as US Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Keith Krach was in Taipei, the most senior State Department office to come in four decades.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, NDTV



Student leader Panusaya Sithijirawattankul hands over a letter to Royal Guard police, with demands for reforming the monarchy, during a mass rally to call for the ouster of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha’s government and reforms in the monarchy in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Thailand ‘belongs to the people’

Protesters defy monarchy with ‘People’s Plaque’ as movement intensifies

AFP, Bangkok

Thousands of protesters cheered as activists installed a plaque in Bangkok Sunday declaring that Thailand “belongs to the people” -- the boldest show of defiance in a youth-led movement which is questioning the unassailable monarchy’s role in the country.

Thailand has seen near-daily protests for the past two months led by student activists calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, a former army chief who masterminded the 2014 coup.

Demonstrators spent Saturday rallying in Bangkok’s historic Sanam Luang field next to the Grand Palace, where organisers took a stronger line on reform, calling for the royal family to step out of the kingdom’s politics.

Authorities said the demonstration drew 18,000, though AFP reporters on the ground estimated a 30,000-strong crowd at its peak -- making it the largest such gathering Thailand has seen since the 2014 coup.

Yesterday at dawn, student activists installed a commemorative “People’s Plaque” in Sanam Luang field.

“Down with feudalism, long live the people,” shouted protest organiser Parit Chiwarak to the cheering crowd.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Student leaders install a plaque declaring “This country belongs to the people” near the Grand Palace, Bangkok, yesterday.

The new plaque states the date Sept 20, 2020, followed by the proclamation: “The people have expressed the intention that this country belongs to the people, and not the king.”

The movement is pushing frank questioning of the royal family’s role into the public -- once a taboo topic due to Thailand’s draconian royal defamation laws.

The plaque references the original brass one embedded for decades in the ground of Bangkok’s Royal Plaza, which commemorated the end of royal absolutism in 1932.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

US defies world with sanctions

Activates ‘snapback’ clause; world powers dismiss move

AGENCIES

Iran yesterday said its arch-foe the United States was “isolated” after a US unilateral declaration that UN sanctions are back in force against the Islamic republic was dismissed by other major powers.

The Trump administration said the so-called “snapback” of the sanctions was in effect and threatened to “impose consequences” on any UN member state that fails to comply.

Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani yesterday thanked UN Security Council members for standing firmly behind the deal and said that Washington’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran had thrown the US into “maximum isolation”.

America’s maximum pressure against Iran, in its political and legal aspects, has turned into America’s maximum isolation,” Rouhani said during a televised cabinet meeting.

The sanctions in question were lifted in 2015 when Iran and six world powers -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US -- reached a landmark nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

But US President Donald Trump withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, saying the deal -- negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama -- was insufficient. He also renewed and even strengthened Washington’s own sanctions.

The US insists it is still a participant in the agreement that it stormed out of, but only so it can activate the snapback option, which it announced on August 20.

Virtually every other Security Council member disputes Washington’s ability to execute this legal pirouette, and the UN body has not taken the measure any further.

Yesterday, two permanent council members -- France and Britain -- issued a joint statement along with non-permanent member Germany saying the US’s “purported notification” was “incapable of having any legal effect”.

Russia also said the US lacked legal authority.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Washington’s latest move in a statement. Pompeo promised measures would be announced in the coming days against “violators” of the sanctions.

With around six weeks to go until the November 3 US election, Trump could unveil those measures in a speech at the UN General Assembly on Tuesday.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused Pompeo of not having read UN resolutions or the nuclear deal.

“He’s now probably waiting for the movie to come out so he can begin to understand it,” he told state television.



Pompeo threatens of ‘consequences’ if partners do not comply with US move

Rouhani says ‘maximum pressure’ on Iran became ‘maximum isolation’ of US

France, Britain and Germany say US move has no ‘legal effect’



People march during a demonstration against President Alexander Lukashenko’s authoritarian rule in Minsk, yesterday. Tens of thousands of people marched through the capital city chanting “go away” on the sixth straight weekend of protests against Lukashenko, keeping up the pressure on him to quit.

PHOTO: AFP

Ties set to worsen as Pak blocks new Indian envoy

TNN, New Delhi

In what is certain to further destabilise Indo-Pak relations, Pakistan has denied visa to Indian diplomat Jayant Khobragade, rejecting his appointment as India’s chargé d’affaires in Islamabad.

Khobragade’s name had been officially proposed in June this year. In the same month, India had also further scaled down diplomatic ties with Pakistan by asking for a 50 percent reduction in mission strength.

The government sees Pakistan’s rejection of Khobragade as an attempt to get back at India for its decision to downgrade ties and also as a sign of frustration over the fact that Islamabad’s information war on the issue of Kashmir has failed to gain much traction internationally.

Pakistan’s objection is apparently related to Khobragade’s seniority as it thinks he’s too senior to lead the Indian mission when its strength has been halved and at a time when there’s barely any bilateral engagement between the two countries, people familiar with developments said yesterday.

India believes though it’s not for Pakistan to dictate appointment of Indian diplomats in Islamabad and is likely to respond with reciprocal action in due course.

An IFS officer of 1995 batch, Khobragade is currently serving as a joint secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy. He has in the past served as Indian ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic before working in junior capacity with Indian missions in Russia, Spain and Kazakhstan.

Since the two countries recalled their high commissioners last year, their missions have been led by the chargé d’affaires.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

IUB’s project discusses significance of Bay of Bengal in post Covid-19 world

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

The first of the series of webinars organised by Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) titled, “Increasing political, ecological, economic and regional importance of the Bay of Bengal for Bangladesh in the post-Covid-19 world” took place on September 15, 2020 with a panel of experts on the issue at hand.

IUB Vice-Chancellor (acting) Prof. Milan Pagon began the event by saying that these unprecedented times have taught us all a lesson on how collaboration and evidence-based decision making is the only logical approach to combating real world issues and urges the same approach to be taken to find out more about the importance of the Bay of Bengal.

The esteemed panellists also included Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary of the Government as the keynote speaker and Prime Minister’s International Affairs Adviser Prof Gowher Rizvi as chief guest; Prof Imtiaz A Hussain, Dean (acting) at the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, IUB; A Matin Chowdhury, Chairman of the IUB Board of Trustee; Ito Naoki, Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh; M Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC; Admiral (Retd.) Nizamuddin Ahmed; Prof Mustafizur Rahman, representative of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); and Prof Saleemul Huq, Director of ICCCAD. The event was moderated by Ambassador (Retd.) Tariq A Karim, senior fellow at the Bay of Bengal Institute Project, IUB.

The webinar discussed important qualitative and quantitative factors of the Bay of Bengal and unravelled some valuable insights on the issues and approaches required. The first issue highlighted by the officials was the lack of research and data available on the role of the Bay of Bengal. The discussion also emphasised on the sustainability factor that the future plans may require as Covid-19 has shown how important it is to keep in mind the intricacies of the environment.

Prof Imtiaz A Husain discussed the different scenarios to consider and later highlighted the implications of the steps to take. He believes that working on the issues locally and regionally will automatically lead to changes on the global level.

In his keynote speech, Ambassador Masud Bin Momen spoke about how globalisation and the rise of the two major powers, China and India, have led to the Bay of Bengal becoming of greater significance than it was before. He also reinstated the Vision 2041 and Delta Plan 2100 that has already been set in motion along with the other steps already taken to resolve issues regarding the Bay.

Two overlapping strategic processes, the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and the China-led Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) and the four pillars, “freedom of navigations, peaceful resolution of territorial dispute in accordance with the international law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and transparency in infrastructure development and responsible debt financing,” were also introduced and talked about by Ambassador Momen.

Ambassador Momen then offered seven major points to discuss and consider about the issue at hand which include creating a fleet of shipping and fishing vessels to develop coastal areas, exploring the possibility of attracting economic players to set up manufacturing and containerisation facilities inside Bangladesh, exploring the possibility of centrally taking over all the major river bank systems and creating eco-friendly industrial ecosystems while preserving the essential parts of it, considering to have smart power corridors across the Bay of Bengal connecting the GBM-basin and Mekong Delta, creating a blockchain enabled platform economy system, connecting the P2P potential of the Bay of Bengal and considering preserving the skills required by engaging the youth.

Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki stated that Japan will continue to support Bangladesh, and said that both countries share the idea of “free and open Indo-Pacific”.

Chief guest Dr Gowher Rizvi commented that there is lack of research done on the Bay of Bengal, and said its resources should be harnessed for development purposes. He also mentioned about a gap between those who make policies and those who analyse then, stating the two parties do not communicate and that this culture needs a change.

The first webinar from the series ended with Ambassador Karim saying that Bangladesh can show the world how a poor country from about 50 years ago can emerge as a nation that leads the way by setting up a system of governance to harness a purpose-driven goal.

‘A state above the state’

Pakistan’s ex-PM Nawaz Sharif launches scathing attack on military, says struggle not against PM but those who brought him into power

DAWN/ ANN

Pakistan’s deposed premier Nawaz Sharif yesterday staged a political comeback by criticising the powerful Army and said the opposition was not against Prime Minister Imran Khan but against those who brought an “inefficient” man to power.

Addressing the All-Parties Conference (APC) hosted by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) via a video link aimed at launching a protest movement against the Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, the three-time premier launched a scathing attack on the ruling party for its “failure to address the basic problems of the people”.

Nawaz, 70, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supremo, has been living in London since November last year after the Lahore high court granted him permission to go abroad for four weeks for treatment. “Our foremost priority should be removing this selected government and this system. Our struggle is not against Imran Khan,” said Nawaz. “Today, our struggle is against those who installed Imran Khan and who manipulated elections to bring an incapable man like him into power and thus, destroyed the country.”

In an all-encompassing speech, which centred on criticising the Imran Khan-led government, Nawaz spoke on the



“poor state” of Pakistan’s economy, “deteriorating” international relations, “muzzling” of media and “corruption within the PTI”.

“If we don’t do it [take a step] today, when will we?” asked Nawaz.

“Pakistan has been constantly deprived of a democratic system [...] When the vote is dishonoured, the entire democratic system becomes meaningless. When it is decided

before the election process as to who will win and who will lose, then it can be guessed how the public is betrayed and how the public’s mandate is stolen.”

Pakistan has become a laboratory of “such experiments”, added Nawaz.

“Every child knows that no prime minister has been allowed to complete five years in power.”

Nawaz said former PM Yousuf Raza Gilani once pointed to “a state within a state” in Pakistan. “It is saddening that the situation has escalated to a state above the state. This parallel government illness is the root-cause of our problems.”

The speakers at APC — PML-N’s Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif and PPP’s Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari — were united in underscoring the “need for a plan of action”. The opposition, however, has yet to announce what it is.