

NEWS IN BRIEF



**Protesters topple Roosevelt, Lincoln statues in Portland**

Protesters toppled two statues of former US presidents in the western state of Oregon, prompting President Donald Trump to call Monday for the demonstrators to be locked up and for federal intervention. "Put these animals in jail, now," Trump said in a series of tweets after learning of the statues of Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln being felled Sunday night. "The Radical Left only knows how to take advantage of very dumb 'leadership' fools," he added. "This is Biden! Law & Order!" Similar protests in recent months prompted by the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died in police custody in Minneapolis, have led to statues of Confederate leaders and other US presidents linked to America's history with slavery being felled.

**New Karabakh fighting despite ceasefire pleas**

Armenian and Azerbaijani forces yesterday engaged in new fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region despite pleas from world and regional powers for them to observe a ceasefire agreed last week. More than two weeks of conflict between the Caucasus rivals has left almost 600 dead, including 73 civilians, according to a tally based on partial tolls from both sides. The Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, overwhelmingly populated by Armenians, has been controlled by Armenians since a 1990s war that erupted as the Soviet Union fell. But Baku has never hidden its desire to win back control and no state has ever recognised the independence that was self-declared by Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday acknowledged that the ceasefire was not holding and urged both sides to immediately begin implementing it. The European Union and Iran have also called on the parties to properly observe the ceasefire.

**Anwar meets Malaysia king in bid to topple government**

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim yesterday met the king in a bid to prove he has a "convincing" parliamentary majority to form a new government and he called on Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to resign. Anwar said he had the support of more than 120 lawmakers in the 222-seat parliament. The palace said Anwar only provided the number of members of parliament who he said back his bid to become prime minister and not their identities, and it urged him to respect the constitutional process. It is now up to King Al-Sultan Abdullah to decide the next steps in Malaysia's power struggle, which comes as it grapples with an economy battered by the novel coronavirus and a new surge in infections. If the king is not convinced of Anwar's majority, he would likely allow Muhyiddin to stay on. The king could also call a general election on the advice of the prime minister.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# US a 'security risk' for South East Asia

*Says China, urges Asean to be vigilant*

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councillor Wang Yi, yesterday urged Asian countries to remain "vigilant" over the risk of US strategy stoking geopolitical competition in the South China Sea and other parts of the region.

Beijing and members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) should work together to remove "external disruption" in the South China Sea, Wang said during a joint news conference with Malaysia's foreign minister.

"We (China and Malaysia) are both of the view that the South China Sea should not be a ground for major power wrestling teeming with warships," said Wang, who is on a short Southeast Asian tour.

"China and Asean have full capacity and wisdom, as well as responsibility, to maintain peace and tranquillity in (the) South China Sea."

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said maritime disputes should be resolved peacefully through regional dialogue.

China has in recent months held military exercises in disputed parts of the strategic waterway, while Washington has accused Beijing of attempting to build a "maritime empire" in the area.

Wang described Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which aims to cast the United States as a trustworthy partner in the region, as a "security risk" for East Asia.

"What it pursues is to trumpet the old-fashioned cold war mentality and start up confrontation among different groups and blocks, and stoke geopolitical competition," he said.

"I believe all parties sees this clearly and will stay vigilant against it."

**WHITE HOUSE MOVES FORWARD ON ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN**

Meanwhile, the White House is moving forward with three sales of advanced weaponry to Taiwan, sending in recent days a notification of the deals to Congress for approval, five sources said on Monday. The move is likely to anger China, which considers Taiwan a wayward province that it has vowed to reunite with the mainland, by force if necessary.

# China, Russia, KSA set to join UN Rights Council

AGENCIES

China, Saudi Arabia and Russia are poised to join the United Nations Human Rights Council, raising alarm among rights groups who say the countries are among the world's "worst rights violators".

The UN General Assembly was expected to hold elections yesterday for 15 seats in the 47-nation council, with the new members serving for three years from January 2021.

"Electing these dictatorships as UN judges on human rights is like making a gang of arsonists into the fire brigade," Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch, an independent human rights group based in Geneva, said in a statement.

"Serial rights abusers should not be rewarded with seats on the Human Rights Council," said Louis Charbonneau, UN director at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Saudi Arabia was previously on the council until 2019. China, which is under fire over its treatment of ethnic Uighurs in the far western region of Xinjiang and its imposition of a National Security Law in Hong Kong, could also return as a member.

HRW said both countries had a history of using their seats in the council "to prevent scrutiny of their abuses and those by their allies."

Only last month, dozens of nations condemned Saudi Arabia before the council over serious rights violations and demanded accountability for the murder Jamal Khashoggi, a Washington Post newspaper columnist who was killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

Other countries vying for the four seats available to the Asia Pacific region are Nepal, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, while Russia and Ukraine are competing for one of the two Eastern European seats.

Garry Kasparov, a Russian chess champion and human rights defender, described the three countries' probable election as a "joke".



A pro-democracy activist flashes a three-finger salute as she scuffles with police officers during a protest against government and monarchy near the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, yesterday. Hundreds of Thai protesters scuffled with police and threw blue paint at them yesterday and, after 21 of them were arrested, chanted "release our friends!" as the royal motorcade of King Maha Vajiralongkorn swept past.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# 'I have failed' you

*Kim shows tearful side in confronting citizens' hardships*

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appeared to shed tears at the weekend as he thanked citizens for their sacrifices, in the most striking demonstration yet of how he is relying on his "man of the people" persona to tackle his country's deepening crises.

Though the young leader has consolidated his rule over the isolated nation with ruthless purges, North Korea watchers say he has also sought to portray himself as a more traditional political leader than his eccentric father, Kim Jong Il.

Speaking at a military parade on Saturday, Kim became emotional as he paid tribute to troops for their response to national disasters and preventing a coronavirus outbreak and apologised to citizens for failing to raise living standards.

"Kim's modesty and candour, and his tears and choking, were all highly unusual, even for someone who



publicly acknowledges shortcomings and has an established pattern of being expressive," said Rachel Minyoung Lee, an independent researcher and former open-source North Korea analyst for the US government.

The speech, which was clearly carefully designed to resonate with the domestic audience, likely cemented Kim's image as a competent, charismatic leader who also has a human side to him, she said.

Kim - who broke into wide smiles when huge new ballistic missiles were displayed in the parade - blamed

North Korea's continuing economic hardships on international sanctions, the coronavirus crisis and a series of damaging typhoons and floods.

Since succeeding his father in 2011, Kim has made economic progress a cornerstone of his agenda. But ambitious plans for international trade, and other economic measures have stalled in the face of sanctions imposed over his nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.

"Our people have placed trust, as high as sky and as deep as sea, on me, but I have failed to always live up to it satisfactorily," Kim said, at one point appearing to choke up. "I am really sorry for that."

Kim said the country's success in preventing a coronavirus outbreak and overcoming other challenges was a "great victory achieved" by the citizens.

"Our people have always been grateful to our Party, but it is none other than themselves who surely deserve a bow of gratitude," he said.

# BORDER TENSIONS

## India, China hold 'positive' talks on troop pullback

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian and Chinese military commanders held "positive, constructive" discussions on disengaging troops locked in a months-long standoff at their disputed Himalayan border, the two sides said in a joint statement yesterday.

Diplomats and military officials have held several rounds of talks to pull back from the brink after a clash erupted between border troops in June in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed.

On Monday, senior commanders held a seventh round of talks at Chushul in the western Himalayas that went on for more than 10 hours, officials said. Both sides agreed to maintain dialogue, communication to find an acceptable solution to the crisis.

The trouble began early in April when New Delhi says Chinese troops intruded deep into India's side of the LAC in the Ladakh sector which adjoins the Tibetan plateau. Beijing claimed the area to be its territory and blamed Indian road construction activity in the area for destabilising the situation.

So far there has been no sign of a troop pullback even though winter is approaching and the area is considered uninhabitable.



# Climate disasters doubled

*Says UN as report says early forecast system, actions vital to stymie disasters impact*

AFP, Geneva

Climate change is largely to blame for a near doubling of natural disasters in the past 20 years, the United Nations said as experts called yesterday for more efforts to forecast looming disasters and early action to mitigate their impact.

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction said 7,348 major disaster events had occurred between 2000 and 2019, claiming 1.23 lives, affecting 4.2 billion people and costing the global economy some \$2.97 trillion.

The figure far outstrips the 4,212 major natural disasters recorded between 1980 and 1999, the UN office said in a new report entitled "The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019".

The sharp increase was largely attributable to a rise in climate-related disasters, including extreme weather events like floods, drought and storms, the report said. Extreme heat is proving especially deadly.

"We are wilfully destructive," UNDRR chief Mami Mizutori told reporters in a virtual briefing. "That is the only conclusion one can come to when reviewing disaster events over the last 20 years."

She accused governments of not doing enough to prevent climate hazards and called for better preparation for looming disasters.

While major floods had more than doubled to 3,254, there had been 2,034 major storms up from 1,457 in the prior period. The data showed that Asia has suffered the highest number of disasters in the past 20 years with 3,068 such events, followed by the Americas with 1,756 and Africa with 1,192.

Early warning systems have proven vital to reducing risks from such disasters, said WMO yesterday highlighting how such systems have helped dramatically drive down disaster-related deaths in places like Bangladesh.

The WMO report urged countries to go beyond mere forecasting of weather events and to invest in so-called "impact-based forecasting" -- a system aimed to more effectively trigger early action based on the warnings. Such systems strive to better understand and anticipate the likely human and economic impacts of severe weather. But so far, less than 40 percent of WMO's 138 member states have set up such systems, the report found.

# Bay of Bengal prospects

*Growing importance of the Bay of Bengal for Bangladesh in the post-Covid world*

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Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury



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Tariq A Karim



Zaidi Sattar

With 66 percent of vital oil shipments for India, Japan, and China, and 33 percent of the world's bulk cargo passing through these waters, the Bay of Bengal is practically on the economic highway of the world. This has provided the impetus for growth of maritime enterprises of densely populated littoral countries including Bangladesh. Regional connectivity through the Bay of Bengal can change the fate of the South Asian people.

The observations came at a webinar titled "Regional Importance of the Bay of Bengal for Bangladesh and its landlocked and littoral neighbours". This was the final webinar of the four-part series jointly organised by Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD). The programme was held on October 6, 2020.

IUB Vice-Chancellor (Acting) Prof Milan Pagon started off the discussion by highlighting the importance of data-driven decision-making in the context of the 'new normal'. It helps us to see the big picture which is essential for creating awareness about the increasing importance of the Bay of Bengal, he added.

Referring to the smart harvesting of marine resources he said, "We need to make sure that we don't destroy the marine resources while harvesting." He also emphasised upon regional cooperation in terms of protecting the ecology of Bay of Bengal.

Dr Zaidi Sattar, Chairman of the Policy Research Institute and moderator of the session, pointed out, "Bangladesh has a symbiotic relationship with the Bay of Bengal. The Bay of Bengal has been the conduit for global integration of Bangladesh in the past 25 years which has led to tremendous economic progress for the country."

In her keynote speech, Ambassador Mashfee Binte Shams, Additional Foreign Secretary (East), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, discussed how maritime collaboration could be an answer to the sub-continent's perennial problems. "One fifth of humanity lives in South Asia and many of these people are forced to live in man-made poverty. The region's prosperity depends largely on maritime and inland waterway connectivity, which in turn requires steady cooperation from all co-riparian countries," she said.

The connectivity she talked about is not merely related to transport routes; it has a wider connotation that encompasses infrastructure, institutions and people-to-people exchange.

Ambassador Mashfee further explained, "Nepal, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh share so many complementarities and commonalities that none can afford to prosper alone. Our destinies, along with our past, are entangled. The solution is therefore to deepen ties and build alliances that bind these countries with common interests, shared geography, history and culture. The Bay of Bengal is our common strategic interlocutor for building such alliance. If Nepal, Bhutan and Northeast India are able to properly harness the Bay, they may have the opportunity to fully shift from their current status of 'landlocked' to 'land-linked'."

Sonam Tobden Rabgye, former Ambassador of Bhutan to Bangladesh, highlighted the importance of seaborne trade for landlocked countries like Bhutan and said, "This pandemic provides an opportunity for landlocked countries to link with the global economies."

Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, former Foreign Secretary of the Bangladesh Government, emphasised on revitalising regional initiatives like BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) and BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor) to strengthen regional connectivity.

Rensje Teerink, Head of the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, focused on the infrastructural investment required for regional connectivity projects and said, "Asia will need 1.3 trillion euros a year of infrastructure investments to keep its current GDP growth."

Rameshore Khanal, former Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister of Nepal and Former Finance Secretary of Nepal, stated that peaceful maritime space is a necessity for trade and commerce to continue without fear or disruption. He urged all to be vigilant so that the Bay of Bengal remains free from military action.

Sabyasachi Dutta, Founder Director, Asian Confluence-India, talked about the blue economy of the Bay of Bengal, which can connect to the hill economies of the middle level states of India and to the mountain economies of places such as Bhutan and Nepal.

He further stated, "The northeast of India, along with our northern neighbours, Bhutan and Nepal, and southern neighbours, Bangladesh and Myanmar, together create a unique ecosystem. This binds us in a unique bond of ecology, culture, and economy."

Rear Admiral (retd.) Kazi Sarwar Hossain, ndp, ndc, Adviser of the Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development, emphasised on the strategic advantage enjoyed by Bangladesh being at the crossroads of the economically rising South Asia and South-East Asia. "We need to leverage this connectivity to reap the maximum benefits," he reiterated.

Ambassador (retd.) Tariq A Karim, Senior Fellow, Bay of Bengal Institute Project, IUB, concluded the session by stating that in the post-COVID world, everyone needs to readjust their thinking economically, ecologically and geo-politically.