

Navalny 'poisoned', sent back to jail

Claims doctor of the Kremlin critic

AFP, Moscow

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was "poisoned" by an unidentified toxic substance and doctors have sent him back to jail despite his condition, his lawyer and personal physician said yesterday.

The 43-year-old, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic, was rushed to hospital on Sunday with swollen eyelids, discharge in the eye and a rash on his upper body, doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva said.

"It is indeed poisoning by some unknown chemical substance," his lawyer Olga Mikhailova told reporters outside Moscow's hospital No 64, which treated Navalny. Vasilyeva wrote on Facebook that "some toxic agent may be the reason for Alexei Navalny's 'illness'".

Navalny has been in jail since last week for calling an unauthorised rally.

After his hospitalisation on Sunday doctors diagnosed Navalny with a skin condition, Vasilyeva said.

They treated him with a steroid and he got better, but he has been sent back to jail despite needing to continue the treatment, she told reporters.

She also said she suspected his prison cell could be contaminated.

Vasilyeva is an ophthalmologist who had treated Navalny previously for an eye injury.

She accused the hospital doctors of not wanting to find out what caused Navalny's condition.

"Alexei has been clearly sent back to the detention centre on orders from above," she said, referring to the authorities.

Navalny was jailed for calling a rally against authorities' move to block prominent independent candidates from taking part in Moscow parliament elections in September.



People applaud as US President Donald Trump, surrounded by September 11 first responders and family members, signs HR 1327, an act to permanently authorise the September 11th victim compensation fund, during a ceremony in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington DC yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

China condemns HK protests

Reiterates support for beleaguered leader, police; Business pessimism grows over protests: AmCham

REUTERS, Hong Kong

China yesterday reiterated its support for Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam, and its police, and called on Hong Kong people to oppose violence following another weekend of clashes between protesters and police in the city.

Hong Kong bore the scars of its eighth straight weekend of violent protests, with hard hats, umbrellas and water bottles littering some central streets.

Huge crowds have taken to the streets to protest against a now-suspended extradition bill that would have allowed criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be sent to China to face trial in Communist Party-controlled courts.

The protests have at times paralysed parts of the financial district, shut government offices and disrupted business operations across the city. Officials have also warned about the impact of the unrest on Hong Kong's economy.

Beijing has stood by the city's leader Lam, and the Chinese government's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, which has cabinet-level authority over the former British colony, reiterated that support at a news conference in Beijing.



"The central government firmly supports Carrie Lam leading the Hong Kong government's administration according to law, firmly supports the Hong Kong police strictly enforcing rule of law," Yang Guang, a spokesman for the office, told the news conference.

"We especially appreciate and empathize with Hong Kong police forces and their families for the huge pressure they are bearing," he said.

The most important thing was for Hong Kong to handle the unrest according to the law, Yang said, blaming "irresponsible people" in the West for stirring up trouble in a bid to "contain China's development".

Such efforts would fail, he said.

The briefing was the first held by the office specifically to address the Hong Kong protests, and a moderator at times chided journalists who shouted out questions, telling them not to interrupt.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong said yesterday that, according to a recent survey, international businesses were pessimistic about the short-term prospects for the city due to escalating violence and political deadlock.

Earth's 2019 resources 'budget' spent by July 29

AFP, Paris

Mankind will have used up its allowance of natural resources such as water, soil and clean air for all of 2019 by yesterday, a report said.

The so-called Earth Overshoot Day has moved up by two months over the past 20 years and this year's date is the earliest ever, the study by the Global Footprint Network said.

The equivalent of 1.75 planets would be required to produce enough to meet humanity's needs at current consumption rates.

"Earth Overshoot Day falling on July 29 means that humanity is currently using nature 1.75 times faster than our planet's ecosystems can regenerate. This is akin to using 1.75 Earths," the environmental group, which is headquartered in Oakland, California, said in a statement.

"The costs of this global ecological overspending are becoming increasingly evident in the form of deforestation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, or the buildup

of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The latter leads to climate change and more frequent extreme weather events," it added.

Calculated since 1986, the grim milestone has arrived earlier each year.

In 1993, it fell on October 21, in 2003 on September 22, and in 2017 on August 2.

"We have only got one Earth -- this is the ultimately defining context for human existence. We can't use 1.75 (earths) without destructive consequences," said Mathis Wackernagel, founder of Global Footprint Network.

Maria Carolina Schmidt Zaldivar, Chile's environment minister and chair of the Climate COP25 scheduled this December in Santiago, said a major cause of the date falling earlier and earlier was growing amounts of CO2 emissions.

"The importance of decisive action is becoming ever more evident," she said.

Individuals can get involved by calculating their own ecological footprint at <http://www.footprintcalculator.org>.

Report says 1.75 planets would be required to produce enough to meet humanity's needs.

EU court rules sites must warn about FB 'like' button

Europe's top court ruled yesterday that online retailers must warn web users that they send personal data to Facebook through the "like" button. According to the European Court of Justice ruling, a site that embeds the Facebook "like" icon and link on its pages also sends user data to the US web giant. "It seems that that transmission occurs without that visitor being aware of it and regardless of whether or not he or she is a member of the social network Facebook or has clicked on the 'Like' button," it said. Under EU data protection law, a European retailer and the US platform are jointly responsible for gathering data and sending it to Facebook's Irish subsidiary.

Questions over India teen rape victim's car crash

An Indian teenager who accused a senior politician of rape is fighting for her life after being critically injured in a crash that killed two relatives, raising suspicions of foul play. Her lawyer was also badly injured in the accident, which occurred in northern Uttar Pradesh state Sunday when a truck collided with their car. Police said yesterday they had arrested the truck driver and were investigating claims that it may have been a hit to silence the young woman. "We are analysing all the aspects, we are looking into call details and have recorded statements of eye witnesses," state police chief O.P. Singh told reporters in Lucknow, the state capital. Top rights body the National Commission of Women urged police to conduct an "absolutely free, fair and speedy" probe and said its team would soon meet the teenager's family.

US intel chief to leave Trump administration



US intelligence chief Dan Coats will leave office next month, Donald Trump announced on Sunday, after a tenure in which he was regularly at odds with the president. The departure of Coats -- who has, however, sought to avoid direct confrontation with Trump during his time as Director of National Intelligence -- is the latest high-profile exit from the mercurial president's turnover-plagued administration. Trump tweeted that Coats will leave on August 15, saying he plans to nominate Representative John Ratcliffe of Texas, who serves on the House intelligence, judiciary and homeland security committees, to replace him. SOURCE: AFP



Workers start the renovation to prepare a barrier-free area for two newly elected lawmakers with severe physical disabilities at the upper house of parliament hall in Tokyo, Japan. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US rejected offer as 'not seeking dialogue': Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday the US had rejected an offer from Tehran for more robust nuclear inspections in exchange for lifting sanctions because Washington is "not seeking dialogue".

Under the 2015 nuclear deal agreed to by Tehran, Iran must ratify a document, known as the additional protocol, prescribing more intrusive inspections of its nuclear programme eight years after the deal was adopted.

"If the US is really seeking an agreement... Iran can make the additional protocol into law (in 2019) and (the US) at the same time bring a plan to the Congress and lift all illegal sanctions," said foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi.

"But as we predicted it was rejected by them, because we knew that they are not for talks or an agreement that would yield a proper result," he told a news conference.

According to Mousavi, the proposal was made by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif during a visit this month in New York to dismiss the idea of "Iran being against talks... (while) America is for dialogue".

Meanwhile, Britain yesterday ruled out swapping seized oil tankers with Iran as a second UK warship arrived in the Gulf to conduct convoys that have irritated Tehran.

A sense of crisis in the world's busiest oil shipping lane has been building up for weeks as Iran responds to US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign.

The US economic sanctions and stepped-up military presence are designed to force Iran to renegotiate a landmark 2015 nuclear pact from which Trump pulled out last year.

INDIA'S WILD TIGER CENSUS Population jumps to almost 3,000

AFP, New Delhi

India's wild tiger population has increased by more than 30 percent in the last four years, according to a new census released yesterday, raising hopes for the survival of the endangered species.

The census found 2,967 tigers in the wild across the country, up from 2,226 four years ago in what Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed as a "historic achievement".

"We reaffirm our commitment towards protecting the tiger," Modi said in Delhi as he released the All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018.

"Some 15 years ago, there was serious concern about the decline in the population of tigers. It was a big challenge for us but with determination, we have achieved our goals."

The massive surveys are conducted every four years, with the latest census spanning 15 months and using 26,000 camera traps that took almost 350,000 images across known tiger habitats, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said at the census release.

In 1900, more than 100,000 tigers were estimated to roam the planet. But that fell to a record low of 3,200 globally in 2010.

That year, India and 12 other countries with tiger populations signed an agreement to double their big cat numbers by 2022.

Modi versus Wild

Indian PM to join Bear Grylls in wilderness

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is teaming up with British TV adventurer Bear Grylls to venture into India's wilderness to raise awareness about protecting nature, the show's host said.

India is struggling to protect its environment and its wildlife, as a huge and growing population puts ever more pressure on its wild spaces.

"People across 180 countries will get to see the unknown side of PM @narendramodi as he ventures into Indian wilderness to create awareness about animal conservation & environmental change," Grylls, star of survival show "Man vs. Wild" on the Discovery Channel, said on Twitter.

A trailer for the programme shows Modi, 68, driving into the Jim Corbett National Park in northern India guided by Grylls, with images of a tiger, a herd of elephants and deer running in the distance.

"You are the most important person in

India, it's my job to protect you," Grylls tells Modi.

Modi said he had grown up in nature and the programme with Grylls was a chance to showcase India's rich wildlife.

"For years, I have lived among nature, in the mountains and the forests," Discovery quoted Modi as saying in a statement.

"These years have a lasting impact on my life. So when I was asked about a special programme focussing on life beyond politics and that too in the midst of nature I was both intrigued and inclined to take part in it."

The show, which airs on Aug. 12, is stirring some excitement among fans of Modi, who led his party to a second straight general election victory this year.

"This is unbelievable. PM Modi knows how to do it," said one Twitter user, Akash Jain.

India, which stretches from snow-bound Himalayan heights in the north to steamy tropics in the south, is home to most of the world's remaining wild tigers.



Report alleges abuses at UN agency for Palestinians

AFP, Ramallah

An internal ethics report has alleged mismanagement and abuses of authority at the highest levels of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees even as the organisation faced an unprecedented crisis after US funding cuts.

The allegations included in the confidential report by the agency's ethics department are now being scrutinised by UN investigators.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) said it is cooperating fully with the investigation and that it cannot comment in detail because the probe is ongoing.

AFP has obtained a copy of the report which describes "credible and corroborated" allegations of serious ethical abuses, including involving UNRWA's top official, Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl.

It says the allegations include senior management engaging in "sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority, for personal gain, to suppress legitimate dissent, and to otherwise achieve their personal objectives."

One senior official named in the report has left the organisation due to "inappropriate behaviour" linked to the investigation, UNRWA said, while another has resigned for what the agency called "personal reasons."

UNRWA said in response to AFP questions that it "is probably among the most scrutinised UN agencies in view of the nature of the conflict and complex and politicised environment it is working in."