

UK 'confident' Moscow helped hackers target virus vaccine

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab yesterday said he was "absolutely confident" in allegations by the UK and its allies that Russia targeted labs conducting coronavirus research, branding the behaviour "outrageous and reprehensible". Britain, the United States and Canada on Thursday accused a hacking group called APT29 of spearheading the online attacks on various organisations involved in COVID-19 vaccine development. They said the collective is "almost certainly" linked to Russian intelligence, and intended to steal information and intellectual property. Moscow quickly rejected the accusations as "groundless", and its ambassador to London said in a British television interview Sunday the claims made "no sense".

France, Germany, Italy threaten sanctions over Libya

The leaders of France, Germany and Italy on Saturday threatened for the first time to use sanctions against countries that continued to violate a United Nations arms embargo on Libya. French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte urged "all foreign actors to end their increasing interference and to fully respect the arms embargo established by the United Nations Security Council" in a joint statement issued by the French presidency after meeting in Brussels. Turkey has intervened decisively in recent weeks in Libya, providing air support, weapons and allied fighters from Syria to help the internationally recognised government based in Tripoli repel a year-long assault by the forces of eastern commander Khalifa Haftar. Haftar is backed by the UAE, Egypt and Russia, which have also been accused by the UN of breaking the embargo.

Twitter disables Trump tweet over copyright complaint



Twitter Inc disabled a campaign-style video that President Donald Trump retweeted on Saturday, citing a copyright complaint. The video, which included music from the group Linkin Park, disappeared from the president's Twitter feed late Saturday with the notification: "This media has been disabled in response to a report by the copyright owner." Twitter removed the video, which Trump had retweeted from White House social media director Dan Scavino, after it received a Digital Millennium Copyright Act notice from Machine Shop Entertainment, according to a notice posted on the Lumen Database which collects requests for removal of online materials. Machine Shop is a management company owned by the rock band Linkin Park, according to its LinkedIn page.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



People arrive to watch a film from boats along the Bassin de la Villette, in Paris following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in France, on Saturday. While the cinema drive-in may have gotten a boost as lockdowns gradually come to an end amid the Covid-19 outbreak, in Paris film fans can now munch on their popcorn watching a movie from a boat on the river Seine. As part of Paris Plages, the yearly transformation of sections of the Seine into man-made beaches, moviegoers on Saturday were able to board 38 electric boats for a free showing of the 2018 French comedy "Le Grand Bain". PHOTO: REUTERS

DEBT FREEZE EXTENSION TO POOR STATES

G20 stops short of declaration

REUTERS, Washington/Dubai

Finance officials from the Group of 20 countries has called for all official bilateral creditors to implement fully a short-term debt freeze for the world's poorest countries, but stopped short of extending the initiative into next year.

Sources briefed on the G20 meeting said there was strong support for extending the standstill beyond the end of 2020, given the severity of the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, but the group's final communique said only that the issue would be considered in the second half of 2020.

It also said nothing about growing calls for cancelling - not just deferring - the debts of some of the poorest countries.

The Debt Service Suspension Initiative, agreed by G20 ministers in April, has proven challenging to implement, with only 42 of 73 eligible countries expressing interest thus far, saving just \$5.3 billion in service payments instead of the \$12 billion initially promised.

World Bank officials have singled out China, the largest creditor for developing nations, for holding back debts owed to its state-owned development and state-owned companies.

Decisions on extending the freeze would come after the IMF and World Bank complete a report on the liquidity needs of countries before the next G20 finance officials' meeting in October, the communique said.

189 killed in India, Nepal floods

Nearly 4 million people displaced; floods situation worsens in China

AGENCIES

Nearly four million people in India's northeastern state of Assam and neighbouring Nepal have been displaced by heavy flooding from monsoon rains, with dozens missing as deaths rose to at least 189, government officials said yesterday.

The overflowing Brahmaputra River, which flows through China's Tibet, India and Bangladesh, has damaged crops and triggered mudslides, displacing millions of people, officials said.

More than 2.75 million people in Assam have been displaced by three waves of floods since late May that has claimed 79 lives after two more deaths were reported overnight, a state government official said.

"The flood situation remains critical with most of the rivers flowing menacingly above the danger mark," Assam water resources Minister Keshab Mahanta told Reuters.

Assam is facing the twin challenge of combating floods and the coronavirus pandemic. Out of 33 districts, 25 remained affected after the current wave of flooding, beginning a fortnight ago.



India is grappling with the novel coronavirus, which has infected nearly 1.1 million people and 26,816 have died from the COVID-19 disease, government data showed yesterday.

In neighbouring Nepal, the government yesterday asked residents along its southern plains to remain alert as heavy monsoon rains were expected to pound the Himalayan nation where more than 100 have died in floods and landslides since June, officials said.

Some 110 people were killed and another 100 injured as landslides and flash floods washed or swept away homes, upended roads and bridges and displaced hundreds

of others in 26 of the country's 77 districts, police said. Home ministry official Murari Wasti said the death toll was expected to rise as 48 people were still missing.

Barun Paudel of the weather forecasting office in the capital, Kathmandu, said heavy rains were expected to pound much of the mainly mountainous nation in the next four days.

In China, vast swaths of territories have been inundated by the worst flooding in decades along the mighty Yangtze River, with residents piling into boats and makeshift rafts to escape a deluge that has collapsed flood defences and turned their homes into waterways.

Heavy rains since June have left at least 141 people dead and missing, forced nearly 15 million people to be evacuated from their homes in July alone, according to the government.

Waters in more than 400 rivers have exceeded warning levels, while some have reached historic highs over a period that officials say has caused the highest average rainfall levels across the Yangtze basin since 1961.

China committing 'gross' abuses against Uighurs: UK

AFP, London

Britain yesterday accused Beijing of "gross, egregious human rights abuses" over its "deeply troubling" treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in China's western Xinjiang region.

Rights groups and experts estimate that more than one million ethnic Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking minorities have been rounded up into a network of internment camps.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said the reports of forced sterilisations and mass detentions in the predominantly Muslim region required international attention.

"It is clear that there are gross, egregious human rights abuses going on... it is deeply, deeply troubling," he told the BBC.

"The reports and the human aspects of it... are reminiscent of something we have not seen for a long, long time, and this is from a leading member of the international community that wants to be taken seriously.

"We want a positive relationship (with

China), but we cannot see behaviour like that and not call it out," Raab added.

His comments come as tensions between London and China are rising over a host of issues.

Britain on Tuesday bowed to sustained pressure from Washington and ordered the phased removal of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei from its 5G network despite warnings of retaliation from Beijing.

The two sides have also clashed over Beijing's imposition of a controversial national security law in Hong Kong.

Raab said he will update British lawmakers on Monday on the UK government's next steps regarding Beijing's draconian new law in Hong Kong. That will include announcing the outcome of a review of extradition arrangements with the former colonial territory.

However, China's ambassador to London warned Sunday that it will make a "resolute response" if Britain follows the US in sanctioning Chinese officials for the alleged abuses.

Syria votes for new parliament

AFP, Damascus

Syrians yesterday voted to elect a new parliament as the Damascus government grapples with international sanctions and a crumbling economy after retaking large parts of the war-torn country.

More than 7,400 polling stations opened across government-held parts of Syria, including for the first time in former opposition strongholds, the electoral commission said.

President Bashar al-Assad's Baath party and its allies are ipped to win most of parliament's 250 seats.

This year's vote comes as Damascus struggles to redress an economy battered by nine years of war, Western sanctions. Food prices in Syria have shot up by more than 200 percent in the past year and now stand at 20 times their pre-war levels, the World Food Programme says.



Police disperse pro-democracy protesters with pepper spray as they gather to mark the anniversary of the attack by more than 100 white-wearing men with pipes and poles on July 21 last year, at Yuen Long, in Hong Kong, China, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Mourners pay their respect to late Rep. John Lewis, a pioneer of the civil rights movement and long-time member of the U.S. House of Representatives, at a makeshift memorial in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'It's my right not to wear mask'

California's anti-mask proponents slam 'hoax' amid escalating pandemic

AFP, Huntington Beach

For Davey, a resident of the city of Huntington Beach in southern California, the requirement to wear a mask to curb the spread of coronavirus is not something he takes seriously.

"It's a hoax," the 51-year-old told AFP as he exited a clothing store maskless, referring to a state rule that people in most public places wear face coverings.

"The more you test people, the more you come up with new cases," he said, echoing words from President Donald Trump as he attempted to explain the record number of infections recently recorded in California and several other states.

Davey is not the only resident of this city in Orange County, which has a large Republican presence, to revolt against lockdowns and mask rules.

"It's my constitutional, God-given right not to wear a mask," said Davey, who declined to give his last name.

While the number of COVID-19 cases in Orange County has not exploded like in some particularly hard-hit cities across the country's south and west, the disease's incidence is still worrisome.



US deaths from the novel coronavirus topped 140,000 on Saturday as cases continued to rise in 42 out of 50 states over the past two weeks, according to a Reuters tally. Since late June, the United States has seen a resurgence in new cases and now, six weeks later, deaths have also begun rising, according to a weekly Reuters analysis of state and county data.

An employee at a nearby shop said many business owners had given up trying to ensure mask compliance, given how sensitive the issue has become.

Few people encountered along city streets on

a recent afternoon wore masks.

Among them was Tracy, a 25-year-old walking back from the beach carrying her surfboard. She said she initially tried to convince friends to wear masks but eventually gave up.

"It sometimes ended up quickly in a fight," she said. "I don't know why, but the issue is totally sensitive. I decided to let it go."

Controversy over the issue prompted the county's chief health officer, Nichole Quick, to resign last month after weeks of defending her countywide face mask order. Her successor scrapped the mandate, saying that masks would be "strongly recommended," not required.

Meanwhile, County Sheriff Don Barnes has said he won't enforce the statewide mask order, opting instead for "education first."

Alison Dundes Renteln, a political science professor at USC, said the controversy goes beyond political identity.

"I'm not denying that there is a kind of a tribalism, hyper-politicization," she told AFP. "But I think it is much more complex... Americans don't like the government to tell them what to do.

"You know, 'give me liberty or give me death.'"