

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hunt for cockpit tapes after Indonesia jet crash

Bad weather forced scores of divers to temporarily suspend their hunt for a crashed Indonesian jet's cockpit voice recorder yesterday, as investigators worked to read critical details on a flight data device that had already been salvaged. The two "black boxes" could supply key clues as to why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 plunged about 3,000 metres in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea soon after take-off on Saturday, taking with it 62 people. Divers just off the coast of Jakarta had hauled the data recorder to the surface Tuesday, with the hunt now focused on finding a voice recorder on the wreckage-littered seabed. So far authorities have been unable to explain why the 26-year-old plane crashed just four minutes after setting off from Jakarta, bound for Pontianak city on Borneo island, a 90-minute flight away.

Forest loss 'hotspots' bigger than Germany: WWF

More than 43 million hectares of forest -- an area bigger than Germany -- have been lost in a little over a decade in just a handful of deforestation hotspots, conservation organisation WWF said yesterday. Swathes of forest continue to be flattened each year -- mainly due to industrial-scale agriculture -- as biodiversity-rich areas are cleared to create space for livestock and crops. Analysis by WWF found that just 29 sites across South America, Africa and South East Asia were responsible for more than half of the global forest loss. The Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado, the Bolivian Amazon, Paraguay, Argentina, Madagascar, along with Sumatra and Borneo in Indonesia and Malaysia were among the worst affected, it said. Forests are an enormous carbon sink, together with other vegetation and soil sucking up roughly a third of all the carbon pollution humans produce annually. Yet they continue to disappear rapidly, threatening irreparable losses to Earth's crucial biodiversity.

Thousands arrested in South Africa for not wearing masks

South African police have arrested more than 7,000 people caught without face masks in public since the end of December, the government said yesterday. Officials made face coverings mandatory in May last year at the same time as they gradually eased movement restrictions imposed in March to stem coronavirus infections. Police Minister Bheki Cele said more than 20,000 people had been arrested or fined since December 29 for breaching the new rules, including 7,455 people detained for not wearing face masks.

Dynasty politics major cause of social corruption: Modi



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon the youth of the country to contribute selflessly and constructively in politics. Speaking at the valedictory function of the second National Youth Parliament Festival yesterday, Modi remarked that politics is a big medium to bring about meaningful change and like every other field, presence of youth is critical in politics also. He called upon the youth to root out dynastic system. Dynasty politics gives rise to incapability and dictatorship in a democratic setup as these dynasts work towards saving the politics of their family and the family in politics, he said. He exhorted the youth to come into politics as their entry will ensure the end of dynasty politics.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, ANN

US suffers worst day of pandemic

Sees a record 4,470 deaths in 24 hours; Chinese province of 37m declares 'emergency'

AGENCIES

The United States has endured its worst day of the pandemic, with three Americans dying every minute, as China took decisive steps yesterday to stamp out a tiny coronavirus outbreak.

Global infections have soared past 91 million, and the spikes have forced governments around the world to reimpose restrictions such as unpopular and economically painful lockdowns, including in Europe which is battling a devastating second wave.

The United States is the worst-hit nation, logging a record 4,470 deaths in 24 hours on Tuesday, as it reeled from a winter surge in infections that has overwhelmed hospitals and clinics in many areas even as vaccines are rolled out.

"It's most definitely the darkest period of my entire career," said Kari McGuire, a palliative care supervisor at the St Mary hospital in Apple Valley, a small rural town in California.

"I've personally had to watch people that I know, that I care for, watch their loved ones die. It's been very difficult."

Coronavirus patients at the overstretched hospital were crammed into hallways, makeshift ICU beds and even the pediatric ward.

McGuire said there were "astronomical numbers" of Covid-19 deaths -- the United States accounts for a fifth of the world's almost two million coronavirus fatalities.

Authorities on Tuesday announced that starting January 26, all travelers entering the United States by air will need a negative Covid-19 test before departure.

Neighboring Canada also scrambled to contain a



worrying outbreak, ordering residents in Ontario -- its economic engine and most populous province -- to stay home.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford warned that the healthcare system was "on the brink of collapse."

The daily US death toll on Tuesday was greater than the official fatality count for the entire pandemic in China, where the coronavirus was first detected in late 2019.

China largely eliminated its outbreak through a number of strict lockdowns and extensive testing and tracing, but recent weeks have seen a smattering of cases. That has forced more than 20 million people under some form of lockdown in the country's northern regions.

The government of northeastern Heilongjiang province -- home to 37.5 million people -- declared an "emergency state" yesterday after 28 cases were found, telling residents not to leave the province

unless necessary.

China is rushing to inoculate millions using homegrown vaccines ahead of the Lunar New Year travel rush, which authorities fear could boost the risk of transmission.

Japan was set to expand a coronavirus state of emergency on Wednesday beyond greater Tokyo to seven more regions to counter a surge in cases.

While Japan's outbreak remains comparatively small, with around 4,100 deaths overall, medics say hospitals are under heavy strain from the spikes in the worst-affected areas.

Governments worldwide are racing to acquire and deliver vaccines to help end the Covid-19 crisis, though the World Health Organization has warned that coverage is not expected to be wide enough for population-level immunity this year.

One of the Chinese-developed vaccines, CoronaVac, demonstrated a 50 percent efficacy following tests in Brazil, the organization in charge of its production in the South American country said Tuesday.

While that figure is much lower than the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, Indonesia -- one of the world's most populous nations -- has given it the green light and kicked off a mass inoculation drive with it on Wednesday. President Joko Widodo became Indonesia's first recipient of that shot on live television.

While criticism and fears over slow vaccine rollouts are growing in North America and Europe, there was some positive news Tuesday when the European Union started the approval process for the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot.



Iran new 'home base' of al-Qaeda

Alleges Pompeo

AGENCIES

Outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo alleged Tuesday that arch-enemy Iran has become a new "home base" for al-Qaeda, surpassing Afghanistan or Pakistan, an assertion mocked by Tehran and questioned by experts.

"Al-Qaeda has a new home base. It is the Islamic Republic of Iran," Pompeo said in a speech at the National Press Club.

"I would say Iran is indeed the new Afghanistan -- as the key geographic hub for Al-Qaeda -- but it's actually worse.

"Unlike in Afghanistan, when al-Qaeda was hiding in the mountains, al-Qaeda today is operating under the hard shell of the Iranian regime's protection."

Pompeo urged more international pressure, calling the alleged alliance a "massive force for evil all over the world."

But he announced sanctions on several individuals and a \$7 million reward for information on an al-Qaeda member he said was believed to be in Iran identified both as Muhammad Abbatay or Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi.

Iran, a Shia clerical state, is ideologically opposed both to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, extreme Sunni movements that are predominantly Arab, and has fought on fronts abroad against both.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Pompeo "is pathetically ending his disastrous career with more warmongering lies."

"No one is fooled," Zarif wrote.

Israel kills 57 in Syria in deadliest attack since 2018

AFP, Beirut

Israeli raids targeting arms depots and military positions in eastern Syria killed at least 57 pro-regime fighters, in the deadliest such strikes since 2018, a war monitor said yesterday.

The Israeli air force carried out more than 18 strikes against multiple targets in an area stretching from the eastern town of Deir Zor to the Iraqi border, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The overnight raids killed fourteen Syrian soldiers and 27 foreign militia fighters whose nationalities were not immediately known, the Britain-based monitoring group said. The monitor couldn't verify the 16 other people killed.

They wounded at least 37 others. Paramilitaries belonging to the Lebanese Hezbollah movement and the Fatimid Brigade, which is made up of pro-Iranian Afghan fighters, operate in the region, the Observatory said.

Days before the strikes, the Fatimid Brigade transported a consignment of

Iranian-manufactured weapons to eastern Syria from neighbouring Iraq.

They were stored in the region targeted yesterday, the monitor said.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment.

The latest raids came hours after separate strikes near the Iraqi border killed at least 12 Iran-backed militia fighters on Tuesday.

The Observatory said it could not identify the warplanes responsible for the earlier strikes.

It is less than a week since the last wave of Israeli strikes in Syria.

On January 7, Israel targeted positions in the south and in the southern outskirts of Damascus, killing three pro-Iran fighters.

Israel routinely carries out raids in Syria, mostly against targets linked to Iran in what it says is a bid to prevent its arch foe from consolidating a foothold on its northern border.

Observers have warned that Donald Trump and Israel could up the ante against Iran and its regional allies in the dying days of the US president's tenure.



We must strengthen our nuclear arsenal

Says Kim as key party meeting ends

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un pledged to strengthen his country's nuclear arsenal as he delivered his closing address to a top ruling party meeting, state television showed yesterday, days before Joe Biden takes office as US president.

Kim is looking to grab the attention of the incoming Biden administration, analysts say, with his country more isolated than ever after closing its borders to protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic.

A nuclear summit between Kim and outgoing US President Donald Trump in Hanoi in February 2019 broke down over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

"We must further strengthen the nuclear war deterrent while doing our best to build up the most powerful military strength," Kim told the Workers' Party congress, footage broadcast on Korea Central Television showed.

Thousands of delegates and attendees -- none of them wearing masks -- repeatedly rose to their feet in the cavernous April 25 House of Culture venue to interrupt his speech with applause.

Earlier in the eight-day meeting, which has lasted twice as long as the previous gathering in 2016, Kim called the US "the fundamental obstacle to the development of our revolution and our foremost principal enemy."

Its policy towards the North "will never change, whoever comes into power", he added, without mentioning Biden by name.

The North had completed plans for a nuclear-powered submarine, he said -- a strategic game-changer -- and offered a shopping list including hypersonic gliding warheads, military reconnaissance satellites and solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).



EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW OF DR. MOHAMMED FARASHUDDIN AN ACADEMICIAN'S PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

During the last few decades, Bangladesh has made notable progress in the education sector across all levels. While the country has reached near-universal net primary enrollment rate, it has also made the tertiary education accessible, resulting in increasing enrollment in colleges, universities, and polytechnic institutes. One of the key drivers in achieving this change has been the support from the private sector actors, especially in establishing private universities and polytechnic institutes during the nineties.

As of 2019, according to the World Bank, 45% of the tertiary education enrollments have been in the private sector tertiary education institutions. Besides, the enhanced world-class curriculum offered by some of these institutions has helped shape a strong workforce for this fast-growing economy. One of the visionaries who has played a significant role in promoting tertiary level education in Bangladesh in the private sector is the founder of East West University, Dr. Mohammed Farashuddin. The aim was simple, "To provide quality education at an affordable cost in Bangladesh," as stated on the university's website.

To know more about what motivated the erudite scholar to resist the temptation of a comfortable life abroad and return to his motherland to work towards promoting education, we caught up with him on the second episode of *Preronar Kotha*.

"My education was like a religion to my mother. And my father used to think that education is imperative for contributing to the building of the nation," said the academician at the beginning of the interview.

Encouragement from his teachers greatly influenced his lifelong pursuit of education. While discussing his motivations, he shared an anecdote from his high school days, "I used to respect our headmaster Mr. Suruj Ali a lot, even though some people were afraid of him. On our second day at school, he took our English class. There, he asked a very tough question, and I answered that from the last bench. He asked some more questions, and I answered them as well. He then brought me forward to the first bench, where the class toppers used to sit."

In 1966, he joined the elite erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and worked in the field administration as Sub-divisional Officer (SDO). After the liberation war in 1971, he got appointed as the Private Secretary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, where he worked very close to him and oversaw the socio-economic and cultural advancement, formulation, planning, and implementation of the pro-poor and anti-poverty economic policies of the war-ravaged country.

In 1975, he went to Boston University, USA to pursue his Masters and PhD. His perseverance, hard work and focus helped him earn his PhD within 3 years 9 months, while most people take much longer than that. Economics has always fascinated him and the intriguing concept of cost-benefit analysis which he researched as part of his PhD work has later helped him in every aspect of his professional career.

Later on, despite being engaged in full-time professional commitment in his roles in the public and development

sectors including the United Nations, Dr. Farashuddin never gave up on his passion for education and teaching: "I have worked in three countries. Anywhere I went, I tried to find out if I could teach a subject there." Even today, at this age, Dr. Farashuddin loves and enjoys teaching and interacting with the young talented minds.

His dream to contribute to the education sector has made him establish East West University, the third-largest private university in Bangladesh, with the aim to disseminate knowledge and education and develop human capital. Dr. Farashuddin has always been outspoken and tough in making the right decisions. He mentioned that his ability to make tough decisions enabled him to make some positive changes in this professional life.

As the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, he has implemented his learnings and knowledge and executed some rigorous decisions to address the issues of corporate governance. "Directors used to default loans from their own banks, political people used to sit on the director's board. I put an end to all these."

In order to encourage and attract talented officials to Bangladesh Bank, Dr. Farashuddin did one more thing, "Those who joined Bangladesh Bank with four first-class degrees would get four increments, which would ultimately make their net salary a lucrative amount."

As an academician, he believes that our education system in Bangladesh needs some major changes to reduce inequality and to build a better value system. He emphasized the importance of community-based schooling for children. "We need area based or community-based schools. Students need to interact with and go to school with children from their own locality. Uniforms and food will be the same for everyone. Currently in Bangladesh, there are only a few schools, few colleges and few higher educational institutes which are good, if we have locality based schooling and everyone is provided the same education, there won't be education/learning divide."

The devotion to give back to the country and community where he was brought up made Dr. Farashuddin leave a lucrative and rewarding career in the USA after his PhD and return to his motherland. This sacrifice and patriotism stand as an inspiration to our younger generation. He mentioned during the interview.

"I believe that if we Bangladeshis do not stick with each other, if we do not help each other, then we can't take the country to the highest level. This is why I came back."

While conversing, he even added, "If I had Aladdin's lamp, I would change the way our students think. I want them to engage in creative thinking. I feel inspired when I talk to students who came back to Bangladesh to give something back to the country."

The interview was conducted by Dr. Melita Mehjabeen, Associate Professor, IBA, University of Dhaka as part of "Preronar Kotha", an initiative by Prerona Foundation.

You can watch the full interview on the YouTube channel of Prerona Foundation.

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