



A waiter comes out of "Igloo Cafe", a cafe prepared with snow and ice, after serving customers at Gulmarg, a ski resort and one of the main tourist attractions in Kashmir region, India yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Biden warns Beijing over expansionism

Vows to back allies Japan, S Korea, Taiwan and Philippines in volatile Asia-Pacific region

AFP, Washington

One week into the job, US President Joe Biden has sent a clear warning to Beijing against any expansionist intentions in East and Southeast Asia.

In multiple calls and statements, he and his top security officials have underscored support for allies Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, signalling Washington's rejection of China's disputed territorial claims in those areas.

On Wednesday, Biden told Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that his administration is committed to defending Japan, including the Senkaku Islands, which are claimed both by Japan and China, which calls them the Diaoyu Islands.

That stance was echoed by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who told Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi on Saturday that the contested islands were covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty.

Austin said that the United States "remains opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea," according to a Pentagon statement on the call.

Meanwhile, three days into the Biden administration, State Department spokesman Ned Price warned China about menacing Taiwan after it repeatedly sent more than a dozen military fighters and bombers through the island's air defense zone.

"We will stand with friends and allies to advance our shared prosperity security and values in the Indo-Pacific region -- and that includes deepening our ties with Democratic Taiwan," Price said in a statement.

"Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid."

And Secretary of State Antony Blinken told his Philippine counterpart on Wednesday that a mutual defense treaty obliging the US to defend the Philippines against attack in the Pacific also applied to the disputed South China Sea -- something the Obama

administration did not specify.

Those comments and others sought to emphasize that the new Biden administration will not deviate from the firm security stance towards China that it inherited from ex-president Donald Trump.

Washington has long sided with allies such as South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia in rejecting disputed Chinese territorial claims in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

The Trump administration raised the tone when then-secretary of state Mike



Pompeo declared last July that most of Beijing's maritime claims in the South China Sea were "completely unlawful."

In his first overseas contacts after taking office, Austin included not only Japan but also counterparts in Australia, South Korea and India.

Over the past three years, Washington has expanded defense cooperation with India, which sees China posing a military threat both on its northern border and in the seas to the south.

In a call with Indian defense minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday, Austin observed that the two countries' defense partnership "is built upon shared values and a common interest in ensuring the Indo-Pacific region remains free and open," said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

MYANMAR POLLS

Army chief's rhetoric fuels fears of coup

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's army chief has raised the prospect of scrapping the country's constitution as fears swirl about a possible coup by the military over electoral fraud concerns.

The army has for weeks alleged widespread voter irregularities in November's election, which Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide.

The civilian administration has been in an uneasy power-sharing agreement with the army generals since Myanmar's first democratic elections in 2015, as dictated by a 2008 junta-authored constitution.

An army spokesman on Tuesday refused to rule out the possibility of the military seizing total power to deal with what he called a political crisis. And yesterday General Min Aung Hlaing -- arguably Myanmar's most powerful individual -- appeared to echo that sentiment in a speech published in Myawady newspaper.

The army chief said the 2008 constitution was "the mother law for all laws" and should be respected. But he warned that in certain circumstances it could be "necessary to revoke the constitution". The comments follow repeated demands by the army for Myanmar's election commission to release final voter lists from the November polls.

Asylum 'under attack': UN

Urges end to pushbacks, violence against refugees

AFP, Geneva

The UN yesterday voiced alarm at increasingly frequent pushbacks and expulsions of refugees at Europe's borders, warning that the very idea of asylum itself was under attack on the continent.

The United Nations refugee agency called on countries to create independent monitoring mechanisms to ensure the right to seek asylum and to investigate violations.

Gillian Triggs, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, said the agency had "received a continuous stream of reports of some European states restricting access to asylum, returning people after they have reached territory or territorial waters, and using violence against them at borders."

"The pushbacks are carried out in a violent and apparently systematic way," she lamented.

"Boats carrying refugees are being towed back. People are being rounded up after they land and then pushed back to sea. Many have reported violence and abuse by state forces."

The UNHCR also warned that

EUROPE BORDERS



people arriving by land were also being informally detained and forcibly returned to neighbouring countries "without any consideration of their international protection needs."

The 1951 Refugee Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights and EU law requires states to protect people's right to seek asylum and protection, even if they enter a country illegally, the agency pointed out.

International law also protects against so-called refoulement -- returning asylum seekers to places where they risk persecution and

torture, it said.

"Respecting human lives and refugee rights is not a choice, it's a legal and moral obligation," Triggs stressed.

"While countries have the legitimate right to manage their borders in accordance with international law, they must also respect human rights."

"Pushbacks are simply illegal." UNHCR said it had made its concerns clear to European countries and had called for "urgent inquiries into alleged violations and mistreatment".

The agency pointed out that the number of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Europe has been steadily declining.

In 2020, some 95,000 arrived by sea and land, down 23 percent from 2019, and down 33 percent from 2018.

"With so few arrivals to Europe, this should be a manageable situation," the UNHCR said.

"It is regrettable that the issue of asylum remains politicised and divisive despite such declining numbers."



A Palestinian man places a Palestinian flag in an area where Israeli forces cut trees, near Tubas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN brief

Brazil's Covid response worst, NZ's best

AFP, Sydney

Brazil's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has been ranked the world's worst, while New Zealand topped the class, according to research published by a leading Australian think tank yesterday. Sydney's Lowy Institute assessed almost 100 countries on six criteria, including confirmed cases, deaths and testing metrics. "Collectively, these indicators point to how well or poorly countries have managed the pandemic," according to the report.

Russia court upholds Navalny's detention

AFP, Moscow

A Russian court yesterday upheld a decision to detain top opposition leader Alexei Navalny for 30 days after he returned to Moscow this month following a near-fatal poisoning. Judge Musa Musayev of the Moscow Regional Court said a previous ruling by the Khimki City Court should "remain unchanged". During the hearing, Navalny slammed what he described as the "lawlessness" of the process.

'Doomsday Clock' stuck at 100 secs to midnight

AFP, Washington

The "Doomsday Clock" illustrating the perils facing the planet and mankind will remain at 100 seconds to midnight this year amid the threats of the coronavirus pandemic, nuclear war and climate change. "The hands of the Doomsday Clock remain at 100 seconds to midnight, as close to midnight as ever," Rachel Bronson, president of Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, said in a statement.

PEARL MURDER CASE

Pak top court upholds acquittal

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday dismissed a series of appeals against the acquittal of the British-born militant convicted of masterminding the kidnap and murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl, paving the way for his release along with three others.

"The court has come out to say that there is no offense that he has committed in this case," Mahmood Sheikh, who represented accused Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, said. "The court has said he should be released forthwith," the lawyer added.

Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants.

India contains spread of Covid-19

No new cases in fifth of country

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's health minister yesterday declared its Covid-19 epidemic contained as, with most of the country's active patients concentrated in two states, a fifth of districts completed a week with no new cases.

However, an inoculation campaign touted by the government as the world's biggest is progressing unevenly, with a survey showing more than half of Indians reluctant to get vaccinated immediately.

The country of 1.35 billion has recorded the highest number of coronavirus cases in the world after the United States and, with the likely true rate of infection even higher, one study suggests pockets of India have attained herd immunity through natural infection.

Since peaking in mid-September at close to 100,000 daily cases, the infection rate has slowed significantly. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said 11,666 cases were reported in the past 24 hours.

"India has successfully contained the pandemic," he said in a statement. "India has flattened its Covid-19 graph."

Vardhan said 146 of India's 718 districts had had no new cases for a week.

India has around 173,000 active Covid-19 patients, more than two-thirds of them in Kerala and Maharashtra states. It has reported 10.7 million infections and 153,847 deaths - one of the world's lowest fatality rates, attributed partly to its relatively young population.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh			
Office of the Director			
Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi			
Invitation for Tenders (IFT) No. 03/2020-21			
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Health Service Division.	
2	Agency	Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi.	
3	Procuring entity name	Director, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.	
4	Procuring entity code	4112315	
5	Procuring entity district	Rajshahi.	
6	Invitation for	Procurement of High-Tech Medical Equipment for RMCH in the fiscal year 2020-21.	
7	Invitation Ref. No.	RMCH/Tender/03/2020-21/500 High Tech Medical Equipment for RMCH in the fiscal year 2020-21.	
8	Date	28/01/2021	
KEY INFORMATION			
9	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM).	
FUNDING INFORMATION			
10	Budget and source of funds	Government of Bangladesh (GOB).	
PARTICULAR INFORMATION			
11	Tender publication date	29/01/2021	
12	Tender (schedule) last selling date	23/02/2021 (up to 1.00pm).	
		Date	Time
13	Tender closing date and time	Up to 25/02/2021	Up to 12:00pm
14	Tender opening date and time	25/02/2021	At 01.00pm
15	Name & address of the office(s)	Address	
	-Selling tender document (principal)	Office of the Director, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Sonali Bank, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital Branch.	
	-Selling tender document (others)	1. Office of the Director, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.	
	-Receiving tender document	2. Police Commissioner Office, Rajshahi.	
		3. Divisional Commissioner Office, Rajshahi.	
	-Opening tender document	Conference Room, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.	
16	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting	Place	Date Time
		Conference Room, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi	13/02/2021 11.00am
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
17	Brief eligibility and qualification of tenderer	As per TDS of tender document.	
18	Brief description of goods	High-Tech Medical Equipment.	
19	Price of tender document (Tk)	For - Tk 5,000.00 (five thousand) (non-refundable) CTR Code No. 1-2711-0000-2681	
20	Identification	Location	Performance security
	High-Tech Medical Equipment	Central Store of RMCH	The amount of tender security for each item shall be 2% percent of the total value of the item(s) quoted by the tenderer in favour of Director, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital
			Ten percent (10%) of the contract price
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS			
21	Name of official inviting tender	Brig Gen Md. Shameem Yazdany.	
22	Designation of official inviting tender	Director.	
23	Address of official inviting tender	Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi.	
24	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel No. 0721-775651	Fax No. 0721-776323
25	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject in part or whole of any tender instrument without any reason.		
	Note:		
	1. If the date of selling, receiving & opening of tender is disturbed under any unavoidable circumstance; the next working day will be applicable for the same respectively.		
	2. Bidder will have to supply the electro-medical equipment within scheduled time. The item number and quantity may increase or decrease as per allotment of fund & permission of MOHFW.		
	3. The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings.		
Director			
Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi			
GD-189			