

MYANMAR COUP

Junta plans probe of last year's polls

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's new leader said the military government installed after Monday's coup plans an investigation into alleged fraud in last year's elections and will also prioritize the COVID-19 outbreak and the economy, a state newspaper reported yesterday.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing announced the moves Tuesday at the first meeting of his new government in the capital, the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The military had said one of its reasons for ousting the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi was because it failed to properly investigate its allegations of alleged widespread electoral irregularities. The state Union Election Commission four days before the military takeover had declared there were no significant problems with the vote.

In the November 2020 election, Suu Kyi's party captured 396 out of 476 seats contested in the lower and upper houses of Parliament. The main opposition party, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, won only 33 seats.

The military, known as the Tatmadaw, is automatically allocated 25% of the seat in the combined houses under the 2008 Constitution that came into effect under a previous military government.

The state newspaper reported that Min Aung Hlaing told Cabinet members that a new Union Election Commission, with what he described as independent and unbiased personnel, "would examine the voting data to find correct results, and actions would be taken accordingly in the process."



Protesters from Myanmar residing in Japan hold portraits of leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's President Win Myint at a rally against Myanmar's military after it seized power from a democratically elected civilian government and arrested the duo, outside Foreign Ministry in Tokyo, Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ukraine's Zelensky bans three pro-Russia TV channels

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has banned three pro-Russian television channels in a move the presidency said was aimed to stave off Kremlin propaganda. The ban came into effect in the early hours of yesterday after Zelensky issued a decree imposing sanctions against pro-Russian lawmaker Taras Kozak and eight of his companies, including the three TV stations. The channels -- 112 Ukraina, Zik TV and NewsOne TV -- are formally owned by Kozak, but are also linked to powerful MP Viktor Medvedchuk, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The decree late Tuesday made no mention of the reason for the ban, but Zelensky said on Twitter later his country supports freedom of speech.

Over 10,000 detained at Navalny rallies in Russia

More than 10,000 people were detained at recent rallies in Russia in support of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny with many subjected to mistreatment in police custody, monitors said yesterday. Navalny's supporters took to the streets in cities across the country on consecutive weekends last month calling for his release from detention and denouncing Kremlin rule. Hundreds more filled the streets of the capital Moscow Tuesday evening, after



Navalny, 44, was ordered behind bars for nearly three years on old embezzlement charges. At nationwide rallies over the last two weeks, more than 10,000 people were seized by police, the OVD-Info group that monitors opposition protests reported yesterday.

Another 'Hong Kong 12' lawyer has license revoked

A second Chinese lawyer involved in defending a Hong Kong democracy activist charged with illegally leaving the territory said Tuesday he had lost his license. Ren Quanniu, who represented one of 12 people caught attempting to flee Hong Kong to Taiwan by boat last August, showed AFP a court notice revoking his right to practice. Lu Siwei, who was served alongside Ren on the case, had his licence stripped last month. In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the US was "deeply concerned" about the disbarment of the two lawyers. "We urge Beijing to respect human rights and the rule of law and to reinstate their legal credentials at once," he wrote on Twitter.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

NUCLEAR ACCORD WITH WORLD POWERS

Iran's Rouhani rules out changes

Dismisses calls to broaden terms, include regional countries

AGENCIES

President Hassan Rouhani yesterday ruled out changes to Iran's nuclear accord with world powers and dismissed calls to broaden the terms of the deal and include regional countries.

US President Joe Biden has voiced support for returning to the accord, from which Donald Trump exited, but has insisted that Tehran first resume full compliance and consider expanding the deal beyond the nuclear issue.

Iran's regional arch rival, Saudi Arabia, has also called for a role in any future talks on the agreement.

"No clause of the JCPOA will change. Know this. And no one will be added to the JCPOA," Rouhani said at a televised cabinet meeting, using the deal's official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.



"This is the agreement. If they want it, everyone come into compliance. If they don't, they can go live their lives," he said.

Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran in 2018, maintaining a policy of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic.

Iran a year later responded by gradually suspending its compliance

with most of its key nuclear commitments in the deal, under which it was promised economic relief for limits on its nuclear programme.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday asked the European Union to coordinate a synchronised return of both Washington and Tehran to the deal.

But the US State Department spokesman Ned Price said it was still too early to accept such a proposal, repeating calls on Tehran to return to compliance first.

Iran has deepened a key breach of its 2015 nuclear deal, enriching uranium with a larger number of advanced centrifuge machines in an underground plant, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, UN's top court ruled yesterday that it is allowed to take on Iran's bid to overturn US nuclear sanctions.

New TB treatment to cut pill intake by two-thirds: study

AFP, Johannesburg

A new tuberculosis treatment that slashes costs and the pill burden for patients will be rolled out in five high-incidence countries this year, international medical research body the Aurum Institute said yesterday.

TB -- a respiratory disease that is preventable and treatable yet kills more than 1.4 million people every year -- is chronically underfunded, with diagnosis and treatment failing to reach millions.

It is currently the world's deadliest infectious disease, with progress to stop its spread unwound by the Covid-19 pandemic as restricted movement disrupted treatment.

"Enough treatments for up to three million patients are expected to be made available for eligible countries this year," Aurum said in a statement.

The new two-drug regime will reduce the weekly pill intake for patients from nine to three.

This is expected to enable better adherence and outcomes, Dr Tereza Kasaeva, the World Health Organisation's global TB programme director said.

Treatment will initially be administered in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Seven other nations will follow later.

A deal cut between the manufacturer Macleods, Unitaid and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) will cap the price at \$15 for a three-month complete regime.



US President Joe Biden and first lady Dr. Jill Biden pay their respects before the remains of Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick lay in honor in the Rotunda of the US Capitol building after he died on January 7 from injuries he sustained while protecting the US Capitol during the January 6 attack on the building, in Washington, DC, US on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Afghan judge shot dead in ambush

AFP, Jalalabad

An Afghan judge was shot dead in an ambush in the eastern city of Jalalabad yesterday, police said, the third court official killed in less than a month.

Judge Hafizullah was attacked as he headed to work in a motor trishaw, said Farid Khan, spokesman for Nangarhar province's police.

Gulzada Sangar, a doctor at Jalalabad public hospital, said Hafizullah had multiple bullet wounds.

The murder of Hafizullah comes after militants shot dead two women judges working for the Supreme Court in Kabul on January 17.

Several prominent Afghans -- including judges, clerics, journalists, activists and doctors -- have been assassinated in often brazen daytime attacks.

TWEETS SUPPORTING FARMERS' PROTESTS

India warns Twitter to comply with orders to block accounts

AGENCIES

India has written to Twitter warning it to comply with orders to block accounts and content related to a protest by farmers, a technology ministry source said yesterday.

Twitter blocked dozens of accounts in India, including that of a leading news magazine, on Monday after the government said that users were posting content aimed at inciting violence.

But it later unblocked some of these accounts.

"Twitter unilaterally unblocked accounts, tweets despite the government's order. Twitter is an intermediary and they are obliged to obey the direction of the government," the source, who declined to be named as the notice sent to Twitter was not public, told Reuters.

India's Home Affairs Ministry had demanded the suspension of "close to 250 Twitter accounts" that were allegedly posting content that sought to foment violence, a government official previously told Reuters.

"Content with #Modi Planning Farmer Genocide was posted on Twitter, which was designed to inflame passions, hatred and was factually incorrect," the technology ministry source said.

Twitter declined to comment on the notice.

Pop superstar Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg also drew the ire of the Indian government yesterday after they tweeted in support of the massive farmers' protest, reports AFP.

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, a vocal Modi supporter, responded by calling the protesting farmers "terrorists" and Rihanna a "fool".

Indian farmers' leaders yesterday outlined plans to scale up months of protests against agricultural reforms. "This gathering shows the anger against the government and we will continue our fight," union leader Rakesh Tikait told a 50,000-strong rally of the politically influential Jat community in northern Haryana state.

CHILD SEPARATIONS AT US-MEXICO BORDER

Biden sets up task force to reunite families

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden on Tuesday ordered a review of asylum processing at the US-Mexico border and the immigration system as he seeks to undo some of former President Donald Trump's hardline policies.

Biden also created a task force to reunite migrant families who were separated at the border by Trump's 2018 'zero tolerance' strategy.

"We are going to work to undo the moral and national shame of the previous administration that literally, not figuratively, ripped children from the arms of their families," Biden said, as he signed the three immigration-related executive orders at the White House.

The executive orders called for a dizzying array of reviews and reports that could trigger policy changes in the weeks and months ahead, but provide limited immediate relief to immigrants barred by Trump-era rules.

Immigration advocates have urged the new Democratic administration to quickly undo Trump's policies but Biden aides say they need time to unravel the many layers of immigration restrictions and to put in place more migrant-friendly systems.

"It's not going to happen overnight," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

The cautious strategy reflects the tightrope Biden is walking to reverse hardline Trump policies while simultaneously trying to prevent a surge in illegal immigration. Biden opponents could also derail or slow down his agenda with lawsuits if his administration moves too quickly and fails to follow proper procedures.

Meanwhile, US Senate on Tuesday confirmed Alejandro Mayorkas to head the Department of Homeland Security, making him the first Latino and immigrant to hold the position and further solidifying President Joe Biden's Cabinet.

71 homes destroyed in Australia bushfire

AFP, Perth

At least 71 homes have been destroyed in a bushfire raging out of control near Australia's fourth-biggest city Perth, authorities said yesterday, as they told residents to ignore a coronavirus lockdown and leave threatened areas.

The blaze has torn through swathes of land in the Perth Hills and was moving towards more densely populated areas.

Six firefighters received minor injuries -- including one who officials said suffered burns and continued working to extinguish the blaze -- but no deaths or serious injuries have been reported so far.

"To the people who have lost their homes, it's just devastating for them. Our thoughts go out to them," Western Australian fire commissioner Darren Klemm said.

Several emergency warnings were issued, with conditions set to worsen later yesterday and strong gusting winds expected to fan the flames.

The blaze hit a population that had just been forced into a snap lockdown after a coronavirus case was detected. About two million people in and around Perth fell under the stay-at-home orders imposed on Sunday.

"This is a situation the likes of which we have never seen before," said Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan.

"A full lockdown and raging bushfires. It is frightening and it will test us all."



A security dog barks after detecting migrants hidden under a lorry headed to Ireland, at the port of Cherbourg, northwestern France, on Tuesday. The photo was released yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP