

NEWS IN brief

Sri Lanka finally lifts ban on Covid burial

The Sri Lankan government has lifted a controversial ban on the burial of bodies of people whose deaths were caused by the Covid-19 disease, a health ministry spokesman said. In March last year, the government imposed regulations that said the bodies of COVID-19 victims could only be cremated. The rules banned burial, saying the virus could spread by contaminating groundwater. On Wednesday, Muslim MPs urged Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan who was visiting the country to take up the issue with the Sri Lankan political leaders. In response to the policy change, Khan thanked his Lankan counterparts.

Facebook restores news for Aussie users

Facebook yesterday restored access to news for its Australian users after reaching agreement with the government on a landmark law requiring it and other tech firms to pay for journalistic content. The Facebook pages of Australian news outlets were able to update from early yesterday for the first time in a week, since the social media slapped a ban on news content being seen Down Under in a dispute over the law which was adopted Thursday.

Dutch MPs: Uighurs facing genocide

China yesterday condemned a motion passed by Dutch lawmakers declaring that Beijing's actions towards minority groups in Xinjiang amounted to genocide. The Dutch parliament passed the motion on Thursday that "genocide is under way in China against the Uighur minority," joining countries including Canada and the United States in applying the label. Rights groups believe at least one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps in the northwestern region, where China is also accused of forcibly sterilising women and imposing forced labour.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Police officers detain a supporter of India's main opposition Congress party during a protest against new farm laws in New Delhi, India yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

US INTEL REPORT ON KHASHOGGI 'KILLING OR CAPTURE' MISSION

MBS approved operation

Washington set to impose sanctions, visa bans on Saudis

REUTERS, Washington

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, popularly known as MBS, approved of an operation to capture or kill dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi who was murdered in 2018, according to a declassified US intelligence assessment released on Friday in a manner choreographed to limit damage to US-Saudi ties.

Khashoggi, a US resident who wrote opinion columns for the Washington Post critical of the crown prince's policies, was killed and dismembered by a team of operatives linked to the crown prince in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul.

Riyadh has denied any involvement by the crown prince, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler.

"We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul,



Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi," the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in the report posted on its website.

"We base this assessment on the Crown Prince's control of decisionmaking in the Kingdom, the direct involvement of a key adviser and members of Muhammad bin Salman's protective detail in the operation, and the Crown Prince's support for using violent measures to silence dissidents abroad, including Khashoggi," it added.

The Biden administration also was

scheduled to announce sanctions and visa bans yesterday targeting Saudi Arabian citizens over the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but it will not impose sanctions on the crown prince, US officials said.

The US Treasury Department will place sanctions on the former deputy Saudi intelligence chief, Ahmed al-Asiri, and will announce a sanctions designation on the Saudi Royal Guard's rapid intervention force (RIF).

RIF was singled out in the declassified report for its role in the killing.

The United States will also announce visa restrictions against more than 70 Saudi citizens as part of a new policy aimed at nations that carry out activities against journalists and dissidents beyond their borders, a second Biden administration official said. Such activities include efforts to suppress, harass, surveil, threaten or harm them.



Military spending hit record levels in 2020

AFP, London

Global military spending, driven in part by Chinese naval expansion, reached record levels in 2020 despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic contraction, a British think-tank said on Thursday.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said military spending reached \$1.8 trillion (1.5 trillion euros) last year -- a 3.9 percent increase in real terms over figures for 2019.

The London-based think-tank said in its annual "Military Balance" publication that expenditure rose "despite the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent contraction in global economic output".

The United States remained the world's largest defence spender in 2020, IISS said, accounting for 40 percent of \$738 billion globally.

China, by comparison, accounted for 10.6 percent or \$193.3 billion.

Beijing's military spending was the driving force behind growth in Asia's overall defence expenditure, and accounted for 25 percent of the continent's spending in 2020. Asia's upward trend in military expenditure continued last year albeit at a slightly slower pace than in 2019.

The IISS also highlighted Chinese military expansion and the significant growth of its naval fleet, a response driven in part by to Beijing's ambitions in the South China Sea.

Total European defence spending grew by two percent in real terms in 2020, the IISS said.

Europe's Nato members also continued increasing military expenditure, continuing a trend seen every year since 2014 as threat perceptions sharpened following Russia's seizure of Crimea. However, most Nato members are still far from the objective of devoting two percent of their GDP to defence by 2024.

RISING SUICIDES AMID PANDEMIC BLUES

Japan gets 'Minister for Loneliness'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Japan has appointed a minister for loneliness following a recent rise in the number of suicides and the coronavirus pandemic's exacerbation of the issue.

Research has previously found that the country has high levels of social isolation, partly attributed to its culture of working long hours.

The issue has been amplified by the pandemic, in particular with regard to people living alone. In response to calls for action over social isolation and rising suicide rates, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga appointed minister Tetsushi Sakamoto to the newly created role of minister for loneliness earlier this month, the Japan Times reported.

According to the National Police Agency, 20,919 people in Japan died by suicide in 2020 -- an increase of 750 deaths compared to 2019, and the first time the figure has risen from the previous year in 11 years.

The uptick is largely linked to a rise in suicides among women and young people. However, Suga underlined that "there are many kinds of loneliness" that need to be addressed, according to the same newspaper, pointing to older people living in care homes who have been particularly isolated during the pandemic.

Gunmen abduct 317 schoolgirls in Nigeria

REUTERS, Kano

Unidentified gunmen seized 317 schoolgirls in northwest Nigeria yesterday, police said, the second such kidnapping in little over a week in a region increasingly targeted by militants.

School kidnappings, first practiced by jihadist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province, have become endemic around the increasingly lawless north, to the anguish of families and frustration of Nigeria's government and armed forces.

Police in Zamfara state, where the latest attack took place, said they had begun search-and-rescue operations with the army to find the "armed bandits" who took the girls at Government Girls Science Secondary School in the town of Jangebe.

Zamfara's information commissioner, Sulaiman Tanau Anka, told Reuters the assailants came in firing sporadically during the 1:00 am raid. "Information available to me said they came with vehicles and

moved the students, they also moved some on foot," he said.

It was the third such kidnapping since December.

School abductions were first the domain of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province in the northeast, but the tactic has now been adopted by other militants in the northwest, whose agenda is unclear.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for yesterday's raid.

Perhaps the most notorious kidnapping in recent years was when Boko Haram militants abducted 276 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in Borno state in April 2014. The incident drew widespread global attention. Many have been found or rescued by the army, or freed in negotiations between the government and Boko Haram, also for a hefty ransom, according to sources.

But 100 are still missing, either remaining with Boko Haram or dead, security officials say.

US strikes pro-Iran militias in Syria

At least 22 Killed

AFP, Beirut

Syria yesterday condemned a deadly US air strike on Iran-backed militias in its far east as "cowardly American aggression".

The US said it carried out the strikes overnight at a Syria-Iraq border control point used by Iran-backed groups, destroying "multiple facilities" in retaliation for a spate of rocket attacks targeting its troops in Iraq.

A war monitor said at least 22 fighters were killed in the operation that struck three trucks loaded with munitions coming from Iraq near the Syrian frontier town of Albu Kamal.

It was the first US military action targeting such groups under Biden administration and came just as Washington had opened the door to resuming negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear programme.

The raid also destroyed border posts of the Hashed, an umbrella group that includes many small militias with ties to Iran.

Myanmar civil servant strikes start to bite

AFP, Yangon

Public hospitals are deserted. Government offices left dark. And the trains don't leave the stations.

Despite risks to their lives and livelihoods, many Myanmar civil servants are refusing to work for the junta, as a growing civil disobedience movement seeks to thwart the generals by paralysing the bureaucracy.

"The military needs to prove that they can manage the country well as a government. But if we... the civil servants don't work, their plan to take power will fail," Thida, a public university lecturer who asked to use a pseudonym, told AFP Monday as cities were brought to a standstill by the largest strike yet.

In the three weeks since the coup, Thida has refused to teach her online classes. She joined the nationwide walkouts kicked off by medical workers, many of whom are now in hiding to evade arrest.

From the capital to seaside ports, work stoppages in the private sector have hollowed out offices and factories and forced many bank branches shut.

But it is the civil servants' swelling ranks within the resistance that has the junta particularly rattled.

Without them, it is unable to collect taxes, send out electricity bills, test the population for Covid-19 or simply keep the country running. The spectre of a financial crisis -- already brewing because of the pandemic downturn and a decline in foreign investment -- looms large.

It remains unclear how many of the roughly one million public sector workers are participating.

One crowdsourced survey found members of all 24 government ministries are now involved, while the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar has estimated three-quarters of the civil servants are on strike.

Their absence is beginning to bite. Nearly one-third of the nation's hospitals are no longer functioning, coup leader Min



Aung Hlaing said this week. Paper pushing in government departments has all but halted, according to local media reports, and around the country clerks, drivers and administrators have been dismissed over their absence.

"The military didn't anticipate that a large part of the civil service would walk out and leave them without a state apparatus," said an analyst who asked to remain anonymous as the junta has detained more than 700 of its critics.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Memo No. 35.01.0651.015.07.009.20-490

Date: 24/02/2021

Corrigendum No. 01 (One)

Tender No. 03/ADP/PPFTP/WD-06/PAT/2020-2021

Due to unavoidable circumstances the following changes have been made as stated below:

Name of item	As per Original	As per Corrigendum
Tender last selling date	08/03/2021 at 05:00pm	22/03/2021 at 05:00pm
Tender closing date and time	09/03/2021 at 01:30pm	23/03/2021 at 01:30pm
Tender opening date and time	09/03/2021 at 02:00pm	23/03/2021 at 02:00pm
Name of item	As per Original	As per Corrigendum
ITT 14.1b	The minimum specific experience as a Prime Contractor or Subcontractor or Joint Venture Partner in similar nature of construction work of at least 700 (seven hundred) meter 4-Lane bridge with viaduct/Flyover on the Highway or over river channel(s) successfully completed in a Single contract with a value of minimum 400.00 (four hundred) crore or USD 47.162 million within last 10 (ten) years. For the purpose of similar nature, complexity and methods/Construction Technology, the contract shall be a Highway/equivalent to National Highway Standard (combination of road and Bridge works or separate Bridge works) construction works. (a) At least one Multispan Four Lining Bridge/Flyover Built over the river channel(s) or on the Highway. (b) The Length of the 4-Laning Bridge with viaduct including Box Girder not less than 700.00 meter shall be required.	The minimum specific experience as a Prime Contractor or Subcontractor or Management Contractor or Joint Venture Partner in similar nature of construction work of at least 700 (seven hundred) meter 4-Lane bridge with viaduct/Flyover on the Highway or over river channel(s)/4-Laning road construction including bridge successfully completed in a Single contract with a value of minimum 400.00 (four hundred) crore or USD 47.162 million within last 10 (ten) years. For the purpose of similar nature, complexity and methods/Construction Technology, the contract shall be a Highway/equivalent to National Highway Standard (combination of road and Bridge works or separately Bridge works) construction works. (a) At least one Multispan Four Lining Bridge/Flyover Built over the river channel(s) or on the Highway. (b) The Length of the 4-Laning Bridge/Flyover with viaduct including Box Girder not less than 700.00 meter shall be required.
ITT 35	The amount of the Tender Security shall be USD 2.17 million and/or BDT 18.45 crore in favour of Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Barishal Zone, Barishal, Bangladesh. In case of Joint Venture (JV), each partner of the JV shall submit Tender Security separately as per their share percentage in the JV.	The amount of the Tender Security shall be USD 2.17 million and/or BDT 18.45 crore in favour of Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Barishal Zone, Barishal, Bangladesh.

All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged.

Abu Hena Md. Tareq Iqbal
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