

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST MILITARY ACTION

Pro-Iran groups hit in Syria

22 killed; US leader raises human rights in call with Saudi King

AGENCIES

The US military has struck Iran-backed militias in eastern Syria, killing at least 22 fighters according to a war monitor, in what the Pentagon said was a message from the new administration after recent rocket attacks targeting US troops in Iraq.

In its first military action against Iran-linked groups since Joe Biden became president five weeks ago, the Pentagon said it had carried out air strikes on Thursday at a Syria-Iraq border control point used by Iran-backed groups, destroying "multiple facilities".

"At President Biden's direction", the US raids targeted "infrastructure utilised by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria", spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

"These strikes were authorised in response to recent attacks against American and coalition personnel in



Iraq, and to ongoing threats to those personnel," he said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said all the dead were from Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force, an umbrella group that includes many small militias with ties to Iran.

The attacks in Iraq laid down a challenge to the new Biden administration just as it opened a door to resumed negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear programme. But the administration has also made clear it will not brook "malign activities" in

the region by Iran.

Meanwhile, Biden spoke with Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on Thursday as the US prepares to release a report about the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

He "affirmed the importance the United States places on universal human rights and the rule of law", the White House said in a brief statement after the call.

Biden also emphasised the US commitment to assuring Saudi Arabia security from threats from Iran and discussed renewed diplomatic efforts to end the war in Yemen, the White House said.

The new Biden administration has taken a tougher stance towards Riyadh than the prior Trump administration, pushing for an end to the civil war in Yemen and greater recognition of human rights in the kingdom.

INDIA-CHINA TENSIONS
FMs agree to set up hotline

REUTERS, New Delhi

India and China have agreed to set up a hotline between their foreign ministers as the two nuclear-armed neighbours look to reduce tensions along a disputed Himalayan border where their troops have been locked in confrontation since last summer.

The decision was reached at a lengthy call between Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and China's Wang Yi on Thursday.

On Sunday, both countries said their troops had pulled out from a lake area in the western Himalayan region of Ladakh, where thousands of soldiers backed by tanks and artillery have been facing off since April.

As per an agreement announced by India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in February, the two countries will now hold talks to end close proximity deployments in other parts of Ladakh.

The standoff in Ladakh began last April, when India said Chinese soldiers had intruded deep into its side of the Line of Actual Control, or the de facto border. China said its troops were operating in its own area, accusing Indian soldiers of provocative actions.



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.

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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.

COUP IN 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. Decrying medical professionals' failure to fulfil their duties, he hinted that working doctors and teachers would soon receive cash rewards,

according to remarks reported by state media Tuesday.

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.

In a sign of the generals' growing uneasiness, official media outlets have printed near-daily summonses for civil servants to return or face legal action, while overnight arrests have targeted civil disobedience movement participants.

Hotlines allow members of the public to report anyone encouraging such action.

But the strategy comes at personal cost. Thida, the university lecturer, is not expecting to collect a salary for the foreseeable future.

Groups have sprung up to assist public employees with food and housing, while members of the ousted civilian government have pledged to compensate lost wages should they reclaim power, fuelling the hopes of workers like Thida.

"I am not worried at all about losing my job as I believe that democracy will be restored."

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/WO-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
ID No. 001500
Additional Chief Engineer (C.C), RHD
Barishal Zone, Barishal

GD-392