



(From left, clockwise) Protesters take cover as riot police officers fire teargas canister during a rally against the military coup in Yangon; a pro-democracy protester is being in Yangon; and Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations Kyaw Moe Tun holds up three fingers salute at the end of his speech to the General Assembly where he pleaded for International action in overturning the military coup in his country in the Manhattan borough of New York City, US. Story on page 12.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Trump's revenge

Former US president Donald Trump has signaled he will seek revenge on fellow Republicans who voted to impeach him last month, and he followed through Friday, endorsing an ex-aid against an Ohio congressman. Trump threw his "complete and total" support behind Max Miller, a 2020 deputy campaign manager and White House advisor challenging Representative Anthony Gonzalez, one of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after the deadly January 6 riot at the US Capitol. "Current Rep. Anthony Gonzalez should not be representing the people of the 16th district because he does not represent their interest or their heart," Trump said. Trump was impeached on January 13 but acquitted one month later by the Senate. He has said he aims to play a role in Republican efforts to win back the House in 2022.

Victims of mid-Feb Nigeria school abduction freed

Kidnappers have freed 42 people, including 27 children, snatched from a school in central Nigeria 10 days ago, officials said yesterday, a day after more than 300 schoolgirls were abducted by gunmen in the northwest. In mid-February, gunmen in military uniforms raided the college, killing one student and taking 42 others -- including 27 schoolboys, three teachers and other relatives of school staff, officials said. Northwest and central Nigeria have seen a surge in attacks by heavily armed criminal gangs locally known as "bandits" who raid villages, killing and abducting residents after looting and torching homes. On Friday, in the Jangebe, a village in Zamfara state, a suspected criminal gang attacked the Government Girls Science Secondary School and kidnapped 317 schoolgirls. Zamfara State Police Command, working with the military, is searching for the abducted girls, officials said. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari vowed not to "succumb to blackmail by bandits."

Indian rooster kills owner with cockfight blade



A rooster fitted with a knife for an illegal cockfight in southern India has killed its owner, sparking a manhunt for the organisers of the event, police said yesterday. The bird had a knife attached to its leg ready to take on an opponent when it inflicted serious injuries to the man's groin as he tried to escape, officers said. The victim died from loss of blood before he could reach a hospital in the Karimnagar district of Telangana state earlier this week, local police officer B. Jeevan told AFP. The man was among 16 people organising the cockfight in the village of Lothunur when the freak accident took place, Jeevan said. The rooster was briefly held at the local police station before it was sent to a poultry farm. The organisers could face charges of manslaughter, illegal betting and hosting a cockfight.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, BBC

'Unjustified, inaccurate'

Riyadh rejects US report on Khashoggi; Blinken says US wants change but not 'rupture' with Saudis

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has said it "completely rejects" a declassified US report that found that de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman approved journalist Jamal Khashoggi's 2018 murder.

"The government of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia completely rejects the negative, false and unacceptable assessment in the report pertaining to the kingdom's leadership, and notes that the report contained inaccurate information and conclusions," the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement.

In the partially redacted report released Friday by President Joe Biden's administration, US intelligence concluded that the prince "approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill" Khashoggi.

Saudi Arabia has previously described the murder as a rogue operation and has vehemently denied the crown prince was involved.

"It is truly unfortunate that this report, with its unjustified and inaccurate

conclusions, is issued while the kingdom had clearly denounced this heinous crime, and the kingdom's leadership took the necessary steps to ensure that such a tragedy never takes place again," the foreign ministry said.

"The kingdom rejects any measure that infringes upon its leadership, sovereignty, and the independence of its judicial system," the ministry added.

Khashoggi, a staunch critic of Prince Mohammed, was lured to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 and murdered by a Saudi squad.

The US report said that given Prince Mohammed's influence, it was "highly unlikely" that the murder could have taken place without his green light.

Following the release of the report, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington wants to "recalibrate" but not "rupture" its relations with Riyadh, a longstanding security partner in the Middle East.

Despite its anger over the report, Saudi Arabia also stressed that it was keen to maintain the relationship.



'You can't act with impunity'

Biden says US air strike in Syria a warning to Iran; Tehran says attack encourages terrorism in the region

AGENCIES

President Joe Biden has said that a US air strike against an Iranian-backed militia in eastern Syria, the first since he took office, should be seen by Iran as a warning.

Asked what the message was from the air strike, Biden said: "You can't act with impunity." "Be careful," he added, speaking in Houston during a tour of relief efforts after a huge winter storm in Texas.

Syria and Iran on Friday condemned the attack with Damascus calling it a "bad sign" from the new Biden administration and Tehran saying it would further destabilize the region.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said two F-15E "Strike Eagles" dropped seven precision-guided munitions on Thursday at facilities in eastern Syria used by the militias believed to be behind a spate of rocket attacks on US troops in Iraq.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the administration wanted to make it "very, very clear -- notably to Iran -- that they cannot act with impunity against our people, our partners, our interests. "And I think -- and expect -- that that message was clearly received," Blinken said.

Syria condemned the strike as "cowardly American aggression."

The Iranian foreign ministry strongly condemned what it called "illegal attacks" that are a "clear

violation of human rights and international law."

"America's recent action strengthens and expands the activities of the terrorist Daesh (Islamic State) in the region," Shamkhani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said in remarks to visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein.

"The attack on anti-terrorist resistance forces is the beginning of a new round of organized terrorism," the semi-official Nour News quoted him as saying.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 22 fighters from Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force were killed.

The US action followed three rocket attacks on facilities in Iraq used by US and coalition forces fighting IS.

Last week, the Biden administration offered talks with Iran led by European allies as it seeks to salvage a 2015 nuclear deal. But the new administration has also made clear it would not brook "malign activities" by Iran.

Iran is believed to be searching for an opportunity to avenge the US assassination of top general Qasem Soleimani one year ago. Soleimani, a senior Revolutionary Guards commander, was Iran's key liaison to its allies in Iraq and Syria, and elsewhere in the region.

He was killed in a US drone strike just as he arrived in Baghdad for meetings with top Iraqi officials.

CPAC show shows Trump's influence

REUTERS, Washington

US conservatives praised Donald Trump at an annual gathering on Friday, even unveiling a golden statue of the former president, showing he remains a Republican political force despite violent scenes in Washington last month.

Prominent congressional conservatives - including Senators Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton and Josh Hawley and Representatives Steve Scalise and Matt Gaetz - were among the Trump loyalists speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida, which the former president will address today.

"Let me tell you something: Donald Trump ain't going anywhere," said Cruz.

Trump's tumultuous final weeks in office saw his supporters launch a deadly attack on the US Capitol on Jan. 6 in an attempt to block Congress from certifying Democratic President Joe Biden's election victory, a win that Trump falsely claimed was tainted by widespread fraud.

If there was any doubt that CPAC this year was devoted to Trump, the gold-colored statue of the former president, dressed in a jacket, red tie and Stars-and-Stripes boxing shorts, was on display at the conference site.

The statue drew instant derision online, with commentators comparing it to the golden calf that



enraged the prophet Moses in the Old Testament. Gaetz declared himself part of the "pro-Trump, America First" wing of the conservative movement. "We're not really a wing, we're the whole body," he said.

He also appeared to forecast a future role for Trump, who is pondering another run for president in 2024: "Trump may not have drained the swamp all the way -- yet."

US Senator Rick Scott, a Florida Republican who may run for the party's presidential nomination in 2024, sought to thread the needle between pledging loyalty to Trump and signaling his aspirations for higher office.

He said "President Trump has flaws" but that he had made the party more approachable for working-class Americans.

"We will not win the future by going back to where the Republican Party used to be," Scott said. "If we do, we will lose the working base that President Trump so animated. We're going to lose elections across the country and ultimately we're going to lose our nation."

Trump is expected to talk today about the future of the party and lay out policy differences within a group riven by differences in the wake of his chaotic four years in office.

Some advisers say they want Trump not to use his speech to relitigate the election at length but instead offer a road map to Republicans' regaining control of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the 2022 congressional elections.

Many senior Republicans including former Vice President Mike Pence, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Representative Liz Cheney did not attend this year's event.

CPAC is an event organized by the American Conservative Union, whose chairman, Matt Schlapp, is close to Trump. It is a prime venue for speakers who want to gauge interest in whether they should run for president based on the enthusiasm they generate.

'Man-made' famine leaves Yemen's children starving

REUTERS, Sanaa/New York

Ahmadiya Juaidi's eyes are wide as she drinks a nutrition shake from a large orange mug, her thin fingers grasping the handle.

Three weeks ago the 13-year-old weighed just nine kilograms when she was admitted to al-Sabeen hospital in Yemen's capital Sanaa with malnutrition that sickened her for at least the past four years. Now she weighs 15 kilograms.

They are among some 16 million Yemenis - more than half the population of the Arabian Peninsula country - that the United Nations says are going hungry. Of those, five million are on the brink of famine, UN aid chief Mark Lowcock warns.

On Monday the United Nations hopes to raise some \$3.85 billion at a virtual pledging event to avert what Lowcock says would be a large-scale "man-made" famine, the worst the world will have seen



for decades. More than six years of war in Yemen - widely seen as a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran - have sent the impoverished country spiraling into what the UN describes as the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

Some 80% of Yemenis need help, according to UN data.

Twelve aid groups, including Oxfam, Save the Children and Care International, have warned that 2.3 million children under the age of five in Yemen will go hungry this year if governments do not step up their funding on Monday.

In 2018 and 2019, the UN prevented famine due to a well-funded aid appeal, which included large donations from Gulf nations. In 2020 the UN only received just over half the \$3.4 billion it needed, which Lowcock said was largely due to smaller contributions from Gulf countries. He urged them to pledge generously for 2021 and pay quickly.



Women wearing flamenco dresses take part in a protest against the crisis in the flamenco fashion sector generated by the coronavirus pandemic, in Seville, Spain, Friday. Spain will give a single vaccine dose to under 55-year-olds who have already been infected with Covid-19, the Health Ministry announced on Friday in the latest update of its national inoculation strategy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Make or break year' for planet

UN chief warns new climate pledges 'far short' of meeting

AGENCIES

The planet is on "red alert" because governments are failing to meet their climate change goals, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday.

He described 2021 as a "make or break year" following the release of a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) report analyzing the updated climate action plans submitted by 75 nations ahead of November's COP26 climate summit which found that current policies won't come close to meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

"Today's interim report from the UNFCCC is a red alert for our planet. It shows governments are nowhere close to the level of ambition needed to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement," said Guterres in a statement.

Under the 2015 Paris climate accord, countries committed to reduce their carbon output and halt global warming below 2 degrees Celsius -- and if possible, below 1.5

degrees Celsius -- by the end of the century to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Experts have repeatedly warned that exceeding the threshold will contribute to more heatwaves and hot summers, greater sea level rise, worse droughts and rainfall



extremes, wildfires, floods and food shortages for millions of people.

According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the population must reduce its 2030 CO2 emissions by about 45% from 2010 levels and reach net zero by 2050 to ensure this temperature limit goal is reached.

It shows that the revised climate action plans -- which cover 40% of

countries party to the 2015 Paris Agreement that account for 30% of global emissions -- would only deliver a combined emissions reduction of 0.5% from 2010 levels by 2030.

Guterres called on major emitters to increase efforts to reduce emissions and use the Covid-19 pandemic recovery as a chance to "build back greener and better."

"Decision makers must walk the talk. Long-term commitments must be matched by immediate actions to launch the decade of transformation that people and planet so desperately need," Guterres added.

The report is a "snapshot, not a full picture" of the individual country plans -- called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) by the UN -- because of difficulties posed by the pandemic, said the UNFCCC executive secretary, Patricia Espinosa Friday.

The UNFCCC will release a second report before COP26, and Espinosa urged all remaining emitters to contribute.