

NEWS IN BRIEF

Harassment at work: Aussie politicians lose immunity

Australian politicians will no longer be exempt from rules against sexual harassment at work, the conservative government announced yesterday as it tries to quell public anger over parliamentary sex abuse scandals. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his government would overhaul the country's sexual discrimination laws to make members of parliament, judges and public servants accountable for harassing colleagues in the workplace. MPs, judges and public servants are currently exempt from anti-harassment rules that apply to other Australian workplaces, though they can still face criminal prosecution for sexual assault.

Sri Lanka arrests 'Mrs World'

Colombo police yesterday arrested the current "Mrs World" on charges of assault over an on-stage fracas in which she pulled the crown off the head of the new "Mrs Sri Lanka". Caroline Jurie yanked the crown off Pushpika de Silva minutes after she was declared "Mrs Sri Lanka 2020" at a Sunday gala at Colombo's Nelum Pokuna theatre. Jurie had claimed that de Silva was divorced and therefore ineligible for the prize. Organisers said De Silva is estranged from her husband, but they are still legally married. Pushpika de Silva needed hospital treatment after the incident. De Silva told reporters that she was ready to drop charges if Jurie made a public apology, but she had refused.

Singapore's PM-in-waiting steps aside as future leader

Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said he was stepping aside as the country's designated future leader to let a younger person take over when current premier Lee Hsien Loong retires, according to his letter published in local media yesterday. "I would have too short a runway should I become the next prime minister then," Heng said in his letter. "We need a leader who will not only rebuild Singapore post-Covid-19, but also lead the next phase of our nation-building effort," he added. He is also set to give up his portfolio as finance minister, local media reported. He will continue serving as deputy prime minister. Why he took this decision is unclear but Heng suffered a stroke and collapsed during a cabinet meeting in 2016.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Asia's pandemic woes deepen

Vaccine safety doubts cloud inoculation campaigns amid surging Covid cases

AGENCIES

India, South Korea and Thailand faced mounting coronavirus infections yesterday, undermining cautious hopes that Asia might be emerging from the worst of the pandemic as worries about safety threatened to delay vaccination drives.

India reported a record 126,789 new cases, the third day this week tallies have surged to more than 100,000, catching by surprise authorities who have blamed crowding and a reluctance to wear masks as shops and offices reopen.

More infectious variants of the virus may have played a role in India's surge, some epidemiologists say, with hundreds of cases found of variants first detected in Britain, South Africa and Brazil.

The alarming numbers have led to New Zealand putting a temporary ban on anyone arriving from India, even for the first time blocking New Zealand citizens from coming home, for about two weeks.

New Zealand, which has virtually eliminated the virus within its borders, recorded 23 new cases at its border yesterday, 17 from India.

Two other countries that managed to largely keep the coronavirus under control during the first year of the pandemic were also grappling with new waves, though

smaller than India's.

South Korea reported 700 new cases on Thursday, its highest daily figure since early January, and the prime minister warned that new social distancing rules would likely be needed.

Thailand, which has been planning a cautious re-opening of its tourist industry, reported a rise in new daily infections to 405 yesterday, taking its total number of infections to 30,310, with 95 deaths.

Adding to Thai worries, it has detected 24 cases of a highly contagious virus variant first detected in Britain, its first reported domestic transmission of the variant.

Asia's increasing cases comes as worries are growing over the safety of one of the

most prominent vaccines against the virus: AstraZeneca Plc's Covid-19 vaccine.

Worry about the vaccine could delay immunisation drives in Asia, some of which are already dogged by supply problems. Campaigns in most parts of Asia lag those in places like Britain and the United States.

While India's cases mount, vaccine centres in several parts of the country, including hardest-hit Maharashtra state, have been running out of supplies.

According to the Times of India, 10 states have stocks that will last only three or four more days, including Uttar Pradesh, home to about 200 million people, as well as Bihar and West Bengal. More than 700 million people across India were facing coronavirus vaccine shortages, local media reported.

India's PM Narendra Modi receives his second dose of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin at AIIMS hospital in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



India suffers vaccine shortages as cases keep breaking records

South Korea weighs more virus curbs as daily infections surge

Thailand eyes nightlife curbs to arrest 3rd coronavirus wave

'Extremely rare' UK vouches for AstraZeneca vaccine as countries restrict usage

AFP, London

Britain yesterday moved to reassure the public over the safety of its coronavirus vaccine campaign, after deciding to offer alternatives to an AstraZeneca jab amid blood clot concerns. Health Secretary Matt Hancock urged people to keep getting inoculated, a day after Britain's medicines regulator said the vaccine developed by the British-Swedish firm was linked to 79 cases of rare clotting and 19 deaths.

But those under 30 are to be offered alternatives the AstraZeneca vaccine, more than 20 million doses of which have been administered since early December.

Hancock emphasised the serious side effects were "extremely rare", adding that all three of the vaccines so far approved for use in Britain were "safe for all ages".

Based on the most recent data, someone getting the AstraZeneca vaccine stands a 1-in-153,000 chance of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), the blood clot in the brain, or its equivalent for the digestive tract.

The risk of death, based on data as of March 22, is one in 1.4 million. To put that in a different perspective: the odds of getting hit by lightning in an average lifetime -- about 1 in 15,000, according to the US National Weather Service -- are more than 90 times higher than dying from a brain blood clots after receiving an AstraZeneca jab.

Germany decided in late March to ban its use for anyone under 60, while in Canada -- as in France -- the age threshold is 55. In Sweden the age cutoff is 65.

Italy and Australia yesterday halted the use of it to people under the age of 50. Philippines has halted its use on people over 50, while Belgium set the threshold at 55.

World's priciest painting not a full da Vinci!

PARIS, France

A French documentary has cast fresh doubts over the world's most expensive painting, the "Salvator Mundi" credited to Leonardo da Vinci, revealing a resulting diplomatic tussle between France and its Saudi owner.

The painting of Jesus Christ, nicknamed the "male Mona Lisa", was sold at a 2017 Christies auction in New York for a record \$450 million.

Its secret buyer was later revealed to be Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, though this is still denied in Riyadh.

There have long been questions over whether it was entirely the work of da Vinci. Now a documentary, "The Savior for Sale" by filmmaker Antoine Vitkine, to be premiered on French TV next week, sets out to reveal what was going on behind the scenes.

In the film, senior officials from

President Emmanuel Macron's government, appearing under pseudonyms, confirm that the Louvre's scientific analysis of the painting concluded that while it was produced in da Vinci's workshop, the master himself only "contributed" to the painting.

This apparently went down badly with the Saudis.

"Things turned incomprehensible," says one of the French officials in the film. "The request by "MBS" (bin Salman) was very clear: show the

Salvator Mundi next to the Mona Lisa, and present it as 100 per cent a da Vinci."

Macron ultimately decided to reject bin Salman's request, leaving it to the Louvre to negotiate with the Saudis on how the painting should be presented in their retrospective, said the documentary. No deal was concluded and the museum has refused to comment on the case.



SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW Philippines says keeping 'options open'

AFP, Manila

The Philippine defence department yesterday said it was keeping "all our options open" as a diplomatic row with Beijing grows over hundreds of Chinese vessels in the contested South China Sea.

More than 200 Chinese boats emained at Whitsun Reef, in the Spratly Islands, where China and the Philippines have rival claims.

China has refused repeated appeals by the Philippines to withdraw the vessels.

The comments from Manila came after the United States reminded China of Washington's treaty obligations to the Philippines in the event of an attack in the waters.

Biden plans to crack down on 'ghost guns'

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden was yesterday scheduled to unveil his administration's first steps to curb gun violence, including a plan to reduce the proliferation of "ghost guns," after a slew of mass shootings have put pressure on him to act.

Biden will announce that the Justice Department intends to issue a proposed rule within 30 days to help reduce the increasing prevalence of untraceable, self-assembled "ghost guns," a White House official told reporters. The details of the rule were not immediately clear.

The department also will issue proposed rules within 60 days that make clear that devices marketed as "stabilizing braces" that effectively turn pistols into rifles will be subject to the National Firearms Act, which requires the registration of firearms, the official said.

The list of initiatives to be unveiled on Thursday leave out a number of Biden's campaign promises, many of which require congressional action, including opening gun makers up to lawsuits over murders committed using their weapons, banning assault weapons altogether, and requiring background checks for most gun sales.

Gun control is a divisive issue in the US, which has experienced a significant number of deadly mass shootings for decades. The US Constitution's Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms.

EU fumes over Turkey 'sofagate' furore

AFP, Brussels

EU lawmakers yesterday called for the bloc's top two officials to explain a snowballing diplomatic scandal that saw Commission head Ursula von der Leyen left without a chair at talks with Turkey's president.

The furore -- dubbed "sofagate" online -- has sparked a slew of accusations over Ankara's attitude to women and the EU, sexism in Brussels, and internal political wrangling between the bloc's institutions.

It all centred on an awkward moment at the start of talks between von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel and Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara on Tuesday.

The well-appointed room the three leaders walked into had only two chairs arranged next to the corresponding EU and Turkish flag.

Erdogan and Michel seated themselves while von der Leyen -- whose diplomatic rank is the same as that of the two men -- was left standing.

"Ehm," she said pointedly while



appearing to spread her arms in wonder.

Official images later showed her seated on a sofa opposite one taken by Turkey Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

"EU-Turkey relations are crucial. But EU unity and respect for human rights, including women's rights, are also key," Spanish MEP Iratxe Garcia Perez, the head of the Socialist & Democrats grouping in parliament, wrote on Twitter.

Turkey's Foreign Minister

Mevlut Cavusoglu deflected blame from Ankara and said the seating arrangements were made "in line with the EU suggestion. Period".

Michel drew flak in Brussels for seeming not to support his colleague and readily accepting the only available seat.

In a Facebook post he insisted "nothing is further from the reality or my deepest feelings" and said the "regrettable" scene was down to a Turkish protocol blunder.



Energy giant sued as Spain power lines kill 100s of birds

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona prosecutors have filed suit against energy giant Endesa for the deaths of hundreds of birds electrocuted by its high-wire power lines, court documents show.

According to the lawsuit, a copy of which was seen by AFP on Wednesday, prosecutors are suing the utility for offences against the environment and wildlife for failing to adequately insulate its electricity cables and pylons, creating "a death trap" for birds.

Electrocution occurs when birds touch two wires at a time or when they perch on a conductive pylon while also touching a cable.

In their complaint, prosecutors said 255 birds died in the Osona region north of Barcelona between 2018 and 2020, including protected species such as white storks, griffon vultures, short-toed eagles.

"The electrocution and death of birds due to direct contact with the exposed conductors on pylons owned by the defendant has affected the whole province of Barcelona, constituting a veritable plague," the complaint reads.

Experts say electrocution on power lines is a major threat to many wild birds, particularly endangered species that use pylons as perches.

Britain sheltering 'wanted criminals' Says China after London grants asylum to prominent pro-democracy activist

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday accused the United Kingdom of sheltering "wanted criminals" after prominent Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Nathan Law said he had been granted political asylum there.

London and Beijing are at bitter odds over the fate of Hong Kong, with Britain accusing China of tearing up its promise to maintain key liberties in the former colonial territory for 50 years after the handover.

Law, a 27-year-old former Hong Kong lawmaker and student activist, said Wednesday he had been granted asylum in UK, after fleeing Hong Kong following the introduction of a sweeping new security law.

That provoked an angry response in Beijing. "The UK is clearly a platform for Hong Kong independence agitators, and provides so-called shelter for wanted criminals," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters.

Describing Law as a "criminal suspect," Zhao called the move "gross interference" in Hong Kong's judiciary.

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Memo No. 474 Date: 08/04/2021

e-Tender Notice

Tender/Proposal ID No. & Package No.	Name of the work	Tender document last selling/downloading date & time	Tender closing date & time	Tender opening date & time
564376 01/Database/2020-21	Supply of HDM-4 Version 2 Software including HDM Sentry for HDM analysis under Database Division during the year 2020-2021.	25/04/2021 14:00	25/04/2021 15:30	25/04/2021 15:30

The above e-Tender is published in the National e-GP System Portal <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>. All information and guidelines are available in the e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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Memo no. MFSP-13.01.0000.362.11.306.2021-582 Date: 08/04/2021

Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) for Selection of Individual Consultants (Senior Gender Specialist)

- Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received an IDA credit toward the costs of the Modern Food Storage Facilities Project (MFSP), being implemented by the Directorate General of Food (DG Food), Ministry of Food and intends to apply part of the IDA credit for individual consultancy services on gender and gender based violence (GBV) assessment and management relevant to the project.
- DG Food now invites eligible Individual National Consultants to submit their Expressions of Interest (EOI) in hardcopy for providing the services mentioned below.
- Duty Location: The positions are based at Dhaka but may require field visit.
- Position and Key requirements:

Package	Name of Post	No. of Post	Key educational and experience requirements
SD-49	Senior Gender Specialist Duration: 24 person-month	01(One)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Senior Gender Specialist shall have a bachelor's degree in social science (Sociology/Anthropology/Economics/Social Welfare/Development studies/gender studies etc.), topped up by Masters in any of the above areas; An Advanced degree on Gender Studies/Gender Analysis in Development Sector would be highly preferable; At least 10 years of relevant working experience; At least 2 years of working experience as Gender Expert in any development project; Minimum 5 years experience in Aided project preferably IDA funded project; He/she must have sound knowledge on Policies and Framework for Gender and Development; Excellent communication skills and extensive experiences in delivering training with different audiences; Previous experience in developing and implementing Gender Action Plan (GAP) and strategies in any development project.

- The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the above position is available in the website: www.mfsp.gov.bd that will provide detail scope of work and required qualifications and experiences.
- Selection Procedures:** MFSP, DG Food now invites EOI from eligible applicant to express their interest in providing the services with complete CV in prescribed format available at www.mfsp.gov.bd. The individual consultant will be selected in accordance with World Bank Guidelines: Selection and Employment of Consultants under IDA Credits & Grants by World Bank Borrowers updated January 2011.
- Remuneration:** Negotiable consolidated remuneration inclusive of all applicable Tax & VAT as per law of Bangladesh within the project allocated budget.
- Last date and time of submission: 01:00 PM, May 6, 2021**
- Place of submission:** Office of the undersigned.
- Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.
- The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOIs.

(Md. Rezaul Karim Sheikh)
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GD-715