

# MAJOR TALIBAN OFFENSIVE US warplanes help Afghan forces

AFP, Kandahar

American warplanes were backing Afghan forces against a major Taliban offensive in the south of the country even as the US military pressed on with a troop withdrawal, officials said yesterday.

Fierce fighting has erupted in Helmand province since the weekend, when the US military formally began withdrawing its remaining troops.

They were supposed to have been pulled out by May 1 under a deal struck with the Taliban last year, but Washington pushed back the date to September 11 -- a move that has angered the insurgents.

"The heavy US air strikes against the Taliban positions stopped them from advancing towards Lashkar Gah," said Atiqullah, a local government official, referring to the provincial capital.

"The bombing was intense. I have never seen such bombardment in several years."

Attullah Afghan, head of the Helmand provincial council, told AFP Taliban forces had made advances, but government forces had "retaken some of these areas".

A US defence official confirmed air support was backing government forces.

Thousands of Afghans have fled their homes and taken refuge in Lashkar Gah in the face of the new fighting, officials and residents say.

Afghan government officials said dozens of Taliban fighters were killed in fighting on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah as they attempted to overrun checkpoints. The Taliban, meanwhile, said scores of Afghan security personnel had died.

Fighting was also reported in other provinces.



Farmers shout slogans as they make their way to Delhi to join farmers who are continuing the protest against the central government's recent agricultural reforms, in Beas some 55 km from Amritsar, India yesterday. While India battles soaring Covid-19 infections, on the outskirts of New Delhi thousands of farmers still occupy camps where they are keeping up a months-long sit-in protest against government legislation that they say harms them. Farmers began marching towards New Delhi in November to protest against three laws that give the private sector a greater role in buying, pricing and storing agricultural goods and reduce state protection enjoyed by growers for decades.

PHOTO: AFP

# UK eyes third Covid jab for people over 50

REUTERS

Everyone aged over 50 in Britain will be offered a third Covid-19 vaccination jab in the autumn in an attempt to eradicate the threat from the infection entirely by Christmas. The Times newspaper reported.

Trials of two options are under way, supervised by Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer for England, the newspaper said.

The first involves vaccines specifically modified to tackle new variants. The second is for a third shot of one of the three versions already in use: Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca or Moderna, the newspaper reported.

A total of more than 34.6 million people in Britain have been given a first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

Britain, which has a population of 67 million, has deals for over 510 million doses of eight different COVID-19 vaccines, some of which remain under development.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Germany eyes to become carbon neutral by 2045

The German government yesterday said it would set more ambitious targets to reduce CO2 emissions after a landmark ruling by the country's top court declared a flagship climate protection law "insufficient". The government now expects to slash emissions by 65 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and by 88 percent by 2040, with the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2045, five years earlier than previously expected, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said at a press conference in Berlin.

### New Zealand PM Ardern plans summer wedding

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern plans to get married during summer but did not disclose the date, local media reported yesterday. Ardern told Coast Radio that she and her partner television host Clarke Gayford have "finally got a date" for the wedding. New Zealand Herald said in a report. Ardern, 40, got engaged to Gayford, 44, in 2019 and they have a two-year-old daughter. The wedding being planned in summer, which runs from December to February in the southern hemisphere, might not be celebrated in the traditional way as Ardern admitted she "feels a bit too old to have a bridal party", media reports quoted her as saying.

### US ex-cop convicted of Floyd murder seeks new trial

Derek Chauvin, the white ex-policeman convicted of murdering African-American man George Floyd, asked Tuesday for a new trial on claims of jury and prosecution misconduct. The 45-year-old -- who knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes in Minneapolis -- faces up to 40 years in prison after being found guilty last month in a case that prompted a national reckoning on racial injustice and police brutality. Chauvin's attorney Eric Nelson argued that his client did not get a fair trial due to publicity around the case, court and prosecution errors, as well as "race-based pressure" on the jury.

### Saudi Arabia may bar hajj pilgrims for second year

Saudi Arabia is considering barring overseas pilgrims from the annual hajj for the second year running as Covid-19 cases rise globally and worries grow about the emergence of new variants, two sources familiar with the matter said yesterday. Such a move would restrict the pilgrimage to Makkah, a once in a lifetime duty for every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it, to Saudi nationals and residents of the kingdom who were vaccinated or have recovered from Covid-19 at least months prior to attending.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# Myanmar crisis deepens

Ousted gov't to form 'defence force' uniting rebels to protect people

AFP, Bangkok

A shadow government of ousted Myanmar lawmakers yesterday said it has set up a "people's defence force" to protect civilians, as the police and military deploy deadly arms against anti-coup protesters.

The country has been in turmoil since the military deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a mass uprising of daily protesters and a nationwide boycott from civil servants.

So far, nearly 770 people have been killed in deadly crackdowns, according to a local monitoring group -- though the junta has a far lower death toll which it blames on "rioters".

A group of ousted lawmakers who call themselves the "National Unity Government" (NUG) and are working underground to oppose the junta announced their own "people's defence force" to "stop the use of violence against people".



It is intended as a precursor to a "Federal Union Army", the NUG said in a statement -- referring to a long-touted idea of bringing anti-coup dissidents together with Myanmar's ethnic rebel fighters into an army.

Some in the anti-coup movement have called for unity among Myanmar's myriad rebel armed groups to defeat the military's well-trained soldiers.

A few of the groups have condemned the military coup and the use of violence against unarmed civilians. Some are also providing shelter and even training to dissidents

who flee into their territories.

But the more than 20 groups -- made up of disparate ethnic minorities agitating for more autonomy -- have long distrusted the ethnic Bamar majority, including lawmakers affiliated with Suu Kyi's government.

An official of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) -- which has said it is sheltering anti-coup dissidents -- expressed scepticism at the NUG announcement.

"As far as I know, it is the people themselves who walk into the jungle and receive the training from the (ethnic armed organisations)... it is not decided by the NUG," said KNPP vice-chair Khu Oo Reh.

He added that while the NUG has spoken with many rebel groups about a militia made up of civilians, "I have no idea what their intentions are."

Another group along Myanmar's eastern border, which declined to be named, said the statement was "confusing".

## UP PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS

# Warning signs for BJP

AGENCIES

The results of the recently-held panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh do not look good for the ruling BJP led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ahead of state assembly election to be held next year.

The results which came after the party suffered a defeat in West Bengal state assembly polls.

Should the BJP begin to panic now on account of the panchayat election results? Has the Covid bug finally bitten the voters in India's most-populous state, a state that accounts for 80 Lok Sabha seats and will vote for its next government 10 months from now?

The BJP has managed only eight of a possible 40 seats in Ayodhya, the temple town where Yogi lavishes much attention. Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) managed 24 seats, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) landed four, and independents six.

In Mathura, the BJP won only eight of the 33 district panchayat seats, while the BSP emerged as the biggest gainer with 13 seats. In Varanasi, which has twice elected PM Modi to the Lok Sabha, the Samajwadi Party has won 15 seats, the BSP plus independents 17 and the BJP just 8.

In the Panchayat polls, candidates are supported by political parties but do not contest as their representatives.

But, as the results show, there are enough warning signs for BJP in UP, a core state for saffron party. Out of 3050 seats in the polls, BJP managed to get 599 seats. SP got 790 seats while BSP secured 354 seats. The Congress also won 60 seats. And the rest- 1247 seats- went to independents.

That is a lot in a state where the BJP swept the last assembly election in 2017 with 40% of the vote and 321 of a possible 403 seats.



Lilaben Gautambhai Modi, 80, wearing an oxygen mask, sits inside an ambulance as she waits to enter a Covid-19 hospital for treatment in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday. A top scientific adviser to the Indian government yesterday warned the country would inevitably face further waves of the coronavirus pandemic, as almost 4,000 people died in the space of a day.

PHOTO: REUTERS



পিসিআইবি-এটুআই  
গণমাধ্যম পুরস্কার  
২০২১  
গণমাধ্যম : উন্নয়নে, প্রযুক্তিতে



প্রেস ইনস্টিটিউট বাংলাদেশ (পিআইবি) ও এটুআই-এর যৌথ উদ্যোগে পিসিআইবি-এটুআই গণমাধ্যম পুরস্কার প্রবর্তন করা হয়েছে। তথ্যপ্রযুক্তিনির্ভর বাংলাদেশ গড়ার ক্ষেত্রে গণমাধ্যমকর্মীদের ভূমিকার স্বীকৃতি হিসেবে এ পুরস্কার চালু করা হয়। এই প্রতিযোগিতায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য গণমাধ্যমকর্মীদের কাছ থেকে ডিজিটাল বাংলাদেশ এবং তথ্যপ্রযুক্তিবান্ধব নাগরিক সেবা সম্পর্কিত যেকোনো বিষয়ে প্রকাশিত অথবা প্রচারিত প্রতিবেদন, ফিচার এবং আলোকচিত্র আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। প্রতিযোগিতায় নিম্নোক্ত ৮টি ক্যাটাগরিতে একজন করে মোট ৮ জন গণমাধ্যমকর্মীকে পুরস্কার প্রদান করা হবে।

- জাতীয় দৈনিক সংবাদপত্র (বাংলা) ক্যাটাগরি : রাজধানী ঢাকা থেকে যেকোনো বাংলা জাতীয় দৈনিক সংবাদপত্রে প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার।
- জাতীয় দৈনিক সংবাদপত্র (ইংরেজি) ক্যাটাগরি : রাজধানী ঢাকা থেকে যেকোনো ইংরেজি জাতীয় দৈনিক সংবাদপত্রে প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার।
- আঞ্চলিক সংবাদপত্র ক্যাটাগরি : রাজধানী ঢাকা ব্যতীত দেশের যেকোনো অঞ্চলের বাংলা ও ইংরেজি দৈনিক সংবাদপত্রে প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার।
- টেলিভিশন ক্যাটাগরি : সরকার অনুমোদিত টেলিভিশন চ্যানেলে সম্প্রচারিত প্রতিবেদন।
- বেতার ক্যাটাগরি : বাংলাদেশ বেতার, এফএম রেডিও এবং কমিউনিটি রেডিওতে সম্প্রচারিত প্রতিবেদন।
- অনলাইন সংবাদপত্র ক্যাটাগরি : অনলাইন সংবাদপত্র/পোর্টালে (বাংলা ও ইংরেজি) প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার।
- নারী সাংবাদিক ক্যাটাগরি : বাংলা, ইংরেজি পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার ও সরকার অনুমোদিত টেলিভিশন চ্যানেলে সম্প্রচারিত প্রতিবেদন।
- আলোকচিত্র ক্যাটাগরি : ডিজিটাল বাংলাদেশ এবং তথ্যপ্রযুক্তিবান্ধব নাগরিক সেবা সম্পর্কিত যেকোনো বিষয়ের আলোকচিত্র।

বিজয়ীরা পাবেন নগদ ৭৫,০০০/(পঁচাত্তর হাজার) টাকা  
(ট্যাক্স অন্তর্ভুক্ত), ক্রেস্ট ও সনদপত্র

প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার/আলোকচিত্র প্রেরণ ও অংশগ্রহণ প্রক্রিয়া:

- প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার/ ০১ জানুয়ারি ২০২০ থেকে ১৫ মে ২০২১ এর মধ্যে প্রকাশিত-সম্প্রচারিত হতে হবে।
- একজন গণমাধ্যমকর্মী মোট ২টি ক্যাটাগরিতে আবেদন করতে পারবেন।
- দৈনিক সংবাদপত্র/অনলাইন পত্রিকার ক্ষেত্রে প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচারের কপি জমা দিতে হবে।
- টেলিভিশন ক্যাটাগরির ক্ষেত্রে সরকার অনুমোদিত টিভি চ্যানেলে প্রচারিত প্রতিবেদন সিডিতে রূপান্তর করে পূর্ণাঙ্গ ফ্লিপিড জমা দিতে হবে।
- প্রতিযোগিতায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য সংবাদপত্র/অনলাইন পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত প্রতিবেদন/ফিচারের কপি সম্পাদক/বার্তা সম্পাদক ও টিভি চ্যানেলের ক্ষেত্রে সিইও/বার্তা বিভাগের প্রধানের প্রত্যয়নসহ জমা দিতে হবে।
- আলোকচিত্র বা ফটোগ্রাফির ক্ষেত্রে প্রকাশিত কিংবা অপ্রকাশিত আলোকচিত্র জমা দিতে পারবেন। এক্ষেত্রে স্থান, আলোকচিত্রের সময় এবং কাপশনসহ পূর্ণাঙ্গ বিবরণ উল্লেখ করতে হবে। ছবির রেজোলেশন ১৯২০/১০৮০ পিক্সেলের নিচে গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়। আলোকচিত্রসমূহ পিসিআইবি এবং এটুআই চিত্রগ্রাহকের ক্রেডিট সফলিত যেকোনো প্রকাশনায় ব্যবহারের অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করবে।
- প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার/আলোকচিত্র ও লেখা (৬ কপি) ৩১ মে ২০২১ তারিখ অফিস সময়ের মধ্যে মহাপরিচালক, প্রেস ইনস্টিটিউট বাংলাদেশ (পিআইবি), ৩ সার্কিট হাউস রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০ বরাবর জীবনবৃত্তান্ত, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের কপি, পাসপোর্ট সাইজের চার কপি ছবিসহ পাঠাতে হবে। একই সঙ্গে প্রতিবেদন/ ফিচার/ আলোকচিত্রের কপি ই-মেইলে (piba21mediaaward2021@gmail.com) সংযুক্তি আকারে পাঠাতে হবে। ই-মেইলের সাবজেক্ট লাইনে আবেদনের ক্যাটাগরি ও বিবরণীতে নাম-ঠিকানা, ফোন/মোবাইল নম্বর উল্লেখ থাকতে হবে।
- খামের ওপর পুরস্কারের নাম, আবেদনের ক্যাটাগরি ও বিষয় উল্লেখ থাকতে হবে।
- জুরিবোর্ডের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।
- যেকোনো প্রয়োজনে যোগাযোগ করুন ০১৯৮৪৩০২৬৮৯ ও ০১৯১৩৩৯৪৯৪ নম্বরে।

প্রতিবেদন/ফিচার/আলোকচিত্র প্রেরণের শেষ তারিখ ৩১ মে ২০২১  
প্রেস ইনস্টিটিউট বাংলাদেশ (পিআইবি)  
৩ সার্কিট হাউস রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০  
ওয়েবসাইট : www.pib.gov.bd

# Facebook oversight board upholds Trump ban

AFP, Washington

Facebook's independent oversight board yesterday upheld the platform's ban on former US president Donald Trump while ordering further review of the case, in a decision with a potentially far-reaching impact on the regulation of online speech.

The board, whose decisions are binding on the leading social network, said Trump "created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible" with his comments regarding the January 6 rampage by his supporters at the US Capitol.

"Given the seriousness of the violations and the ongoing risk of violence, Facebook was justified in suspending Mr Trump's accounts on January 6 and extending that suspension on January 7," the board said after its review.

But the panel also ruled that "it was not appropriate for Facebook to impose the indeterminate and standardless penalty of indefinite suspension."

"Within six months of this decision, Facebook must reexamine the arbitrary penalty it imposed on January 7 and decide the appropriate penalty," the review board said in its written opinion.

The case had been intensely followed for its repercussions for social networks seeking to curb misinformation and abusive content while remaining open to political discourse.

Trump was suspended from Facebook and Instagram after he posted a video during the deadly January 6 storming of the Capitol in which he told his supporters: "We love you, you're very special."

The US leader was banned permanently by Facebook the following day, and he was taken off other platforms including Twitter and YouTube.

Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows, responding to the decision, said it would have a chilling effect on free speech and that Facebook needed to be regulated or broken up.



# Space aged Wine matured aboard ISS expected to sell for \$1m

AFP, New York

If a bottle of Petrus 2000 that Christie's is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie's hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch \$1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink matures in space.

The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon, Space Cargo Unlimited Nicolas Gaume said in a press release. It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2021 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk's SpaceX.

At the end of a blind tasting, the researchers noted "remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components," between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine. The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby's in New York for \$558,000 in 2018.