

CYCLONE YAAS

India evacuates 2m to shelters

AFP, Kolkata

A powerful cyclone headed for eastern India yesterday, forcing the evacuation of nearly two million people just a week after another huge storm claimed at least 155 lives on the west coast.

Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal is expected to slam into West Bengal and Odisha states around midday today, the India Meteorological Department said, and could bring winds of up to 165 kilometres (100 miles) per hour.

Experts say the warming of ocean waters due to climate change has led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of such storms.

Nearly two million people living along India's east coast are being moved to shelters, officials said yesterday, and the storm has also disrupted efforts to combat the country's devastating Covid-19 outbreak.

"This cyclone is a terrible blow for many people in coastal districts whose families have been struck down by Covid-19 infections and deaths," West Bengal Sundarbans development minister Bankim Chandra Hazra told AFP.

Some vaccination centres in districts under threat as well as the capital Kolkata would suspend operations, officials said, and efforts were under way to ensure the supply of oxygen and medicines to hospitals during the storm.

Some 1.4 million people were moved away from coastal districts in neighbouring Odisha, with thousands of disaster and relief personnel deployed, local media reported.

The state's special relief commissioner, Pradeep Jena, said arrangements were being made to maintain social distancing in shelters, with face masks and sanitisers supplied.



Members of the Kalpulli Ketzal Coatlicue perform a dance during an event in remembrance of George Floyd outside the Minnesota State Capitol on in Saint Paul, Minnesota, on Monday. President Joe Biden as scheduled yesterday to mark the anniversary of the police murder of George Floyd by hosting the African American man's family -- but without being able to celebrate hoped-for national police reform. The choking to death of Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 last year and subsequent conviction of the officer, Derek Chauvin, who'd knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, were seen as seminal moments in the long US struggle for racial equality.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Belarus isolation grows after arrest of dissident

Belarus's regime was increasingly isolated yesterday as Europe cut air links and calls grew for more action over its diversion of an airliner and arrest of a dissident on board. After weathering a wave of protests and Western sanctions last year, President Alexander Lukashenko was facing extraordinary new pressure over Sunday's rerouting of the Ryanair flight to Minsk and arrest of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich. More Western leaders joined calls demanding Protasevich's release, after the European Union agreed at a summit on Monday to ban Belarusian airlines from the bloc and called on EU-based carriers not to fly over its airspace.

India to open consulate in Maldives' Addu

Expanding its diplomatic footprints in the strategic Indian Ocean nation the Maldives, India is all set to open a new Consulate in Addu city, which is the second largest urban area after capital Male, in a country where China is increasingly assertive. The proposal to set up the Indian Consulate in Addu was cleared at a meeting of the Indian cabinet presided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. India already has its High Commission in Male.

Iran bars several hopefuls from presidential polls

Iran's election watchdog has approved the candidacy of hardline judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi in presidential elections, state television reported on Tuesday, while disqualifying some of his main potential rivals. The move is likely to boost the prospects of Raisi, a close ally of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But it may further dent the clerical rulers' hopes of a high turnout in the June 18 vote, amid rising discontent over an economy crippled by US sanctions. The hardline-led Guardian Council barred former parliament speaker Ali Larjani, a moderate conservative, pragmatist First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri and hardline ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from running, according to the state TV report.

Dozens of Palestinian journos say blocked by WhatsApp

Messaging app WhatsApp has blocked the accounts of dozens of Palestinian journalists following this month's fighting between Israel and Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas, reporters said. Shortly after a ceasefire went into effect at 2:00am on Friday (2300 GMT Thursday) ending 11 days of deadly conflict, two journalists in AFP's Gaza City bureau received notices from WhatsApp in Arabic informing them their accounts had been blocked. Other journalists, in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank as well as Gaza, said their accounts had also been blocked. The vice president of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, Tahseen al-Asthal, said "around 100 journalists" in Gaza had seen their accounts blocked.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

SECURITY FEARS IN AFGHANISTAN

Australia to close embassy

AFP, Kabul

Australia yesterday abruptly announced it will shutter its embassy in Afghanistan this week, expressing fears over the "increasingly uncertain security environment" in Kabul as foreign troops withdraw.

The Taliban, which has ramped up violence across the country in recent weeks, reacted by saying it would provide a "safe environment" to foreign diplomats and humanitarian organisations.

The United States and allied forces are in the final stages of pulling out their remaining troops from Afghanistan, ending America's longest-ever war, but heralding an uncertain future for a nation in the tightening grip of Taliban militants. Fears of a Taliban comeback is growing within the country.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the embassy would close in just three days. Around 80 Australian troops are leaving as part of the wider military pull-out, and without that small contingent and the larger US force as back-up, Morrison said there was an "increasingly uncertain security environment".

The elected government in Kabul and Afghan security services remain fragile despite two decades of foreign capacity building, and their success is far from assured without continued US military support.

When the Taliban seized control of Kabul in 1996, they entered the United Nations compound and abducted the country's former leader Najibullah Ahmadzai, who they then murdered. Two years later, the Taliban oversaw the killing of 10 Iranian diplomats at their consulate in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

In recent weeks, violence across Afghanistan has soared and government forces have clashed with Taliban fighters not far from Kabul.

'Lots of hard work ahead'

Blinken, in Israel, vows support for Gaza truce but no 'benefit' for Hamas; truce holds, but mass arrest of Palestinians sparks anger

AFP, Jerusalem

US top diplomat Antony Blinken yesterday vowed support to help rebuild the battered Gaza Strip and shore up a truce between Hamas and Israel, but insisted the territory's Islamist militant rulers would not benefit from any aid.

Blinken's tour, which started in Israel and will also take him to neighbouring Egypt and Jordan, comes as unrest still grips parts of annexed east Jerusalem after Friday's ceasefire ended 11 days of fighting in and around the Gaza Strip.

At a joint news conference in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas later in the West Bank, Blinken warned that Washington would not allow international aid to rebuild impoverished Gaza to benefit Hamas.

"We'll work with our partners closely,



with all, to ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction assistance," Blinken said.

Netanyahu warned that Israel would respond very strongly if Hamas violated the truce.

In Jerusalem, Blinken said Israelis and Palestinians faced an uphill struggle to restore trust, after conflict in Gaza and unrest in the West Bank.

"There's lots of hard work ahead to restore hope, respect and some trust across the communities," the US top diplomat said.

Israeli air strikes and artillery fire on

Gaza killed 253 Palestinians, including 66 children. Rocket and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in Israel.

Blinken's visit comes as the ceasefire holds but tensions simmer in Israel and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Hours before Blinken's arrival, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian and Israeli security sources said. In east Jerusalem, Israeli police said an attacker stabbed two young Israeli men on Monday before police shot him dead.

In the night of Sunday to Monday, Israeli forces rounded up 43 Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said.

Israeli police, who operate in east Jerusalem, said late Sunday that they had arrested 1,550 suspects and had charged 150 over the past two weeks in connection with the "violent events".



Relatives of a man who died from the Covid-19 mourn during his cremation at a crematorium ground in Srinagar, India, yesterday. On Monday, 9,968 new deaths and 481,857 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on the latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were India with 3,511, followed by Brazil with 790 and Colombia with 483.

PHOTO: REUTERS

WHO risks paralysis due to funding shortage

Says top official; calls grow for deeper Covid origin probe

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization (WHO) is mired in a funding shortage that is already hampering operations, its top emergency expert told health ministers yesterday as countries called for a more in-depth investigation of the pandemic origins.

Mike Ryan, noting the WHO's appeal in February for \$1.96 billion for its pandemic response this year, told the annual assembly: "The funding shortfall of more than 70% when only reserved funds are considered has left the organisation in real imminent danger of being unable to sustain core functions for urgent priorities."

"This underfunding and earmarking of funds risks paralysing WHO's ability to provide rapid and flexible support to countries and is already having consequences for current operations," he said.

Addressing the World Health Organization's main annual meeting of member states, representatives from several countries stressed the continued need to

solve the mystery of how Covid-19 first began spreading among humans.

"We underscore the importance of a robust comprehensive and expert-led inquiry into the origins of Covid-19," US representative Jeremy Konyndyk told the World Health Assembly (WHA).

Australia, Japan and Portugal were among other countries to call for more progress on the investigation, while the British representative urged for any probe to be "timely, expert-driven and grounded in robust science".

A long-delayed report by the team of international experts sent to Wuhan and their Chinese counterparts drew no firm conclusions on the origins of the pandemic. Instead, they ranked a number of hypotheses according to how likely they believed they were.

The report said the virus jumping from bats to humans via an intermediate animal was the most probable scenario, while it said a theory involving the virus leaking from a laboratory was "extremely unlikely".

Biden, Putin to meet in Geneva on June 16

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden and President Vladimir Putin will hold their first summit next month in Geneva, the White House said Tuesday, setting the stage for a new chapter in the fraught US-Russian relationship.

The meeting in the Swiss city will be on June 16, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

"The leaders will discuss the full range of pressing issues, as we seek to restore predictability and stability to the US-Russian relationship," she said.

The Kremlin said in a statement that the two leaders would discuss bilateral ties, problems related to strategic nuclear stability, and other issues including cooperation in the fight against Covid-19 and regional conflicts.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

পরিচালকের কার্যালয়

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দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

Table with 2 columns: S/N and বিজ্ঞপ্তির বিষয়. It lists 19 items regarding medical supplies and services, including medicines, lab tests, and general services, with their respective prices and validity dates.