

## NEWS IN brief



### Ghani replaces security ministers

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani replaced two top ministers charged with managing the country's faltering security yesterday, as the Taliban pressed on with their campaign to capture new territory in fierce battles with government forces. The presidency announced in a statement that General Bismillah Khan Mohammadi has been appointed the new defence minister. Ghani also appointed General Abdul Sattar Mirzakhwal as interior minister.



### Ebola outbreak ends in Guinea

The World Health Organization yesterday officially announced the end of Guinea's second Ebola outbreak which was declared on February 14. It was the second such outbreak in the country since the devastating 2013-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which left 11,300 dead in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ebola causes severe fever and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding. It is transmitted through close contact with bodily fluids, and people who live with or care for patients are most at risk.



### Modi to meet J&K leaders

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to preside a meeting with all political parties from Jammu and Kashmir on June 24 in the first concrete move to restore the political processes, including restoration of a popular government through election officials said yesterday. The meeting is the first since the Indian government announced the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 371 of the Constitution and its bifurcation into federal territories in August 2019. The central leadership has begun the process of inviting National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah, People's Democratic Party chairperson Mehbooba Mufti, Altaf Bukhari of Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party and People's Conference head Sajjad Lone for the discussion, the officials said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



An aerial view shows houseboats anchored in low water levels at Lake Oroville, which is the second largest reservoir in California and according to daily reports of the state's Department of Water Resources is near 35% capacity, near Oroville, California, US. An extreme heat wave that has already shattered temperature records across the US Southwest threatened to push power systems to the brink of failure as residents cranked up air conditioners. The heat, which comes amid years of drought across the Southwest, has strained power grids in California and Texas and fueled the spread of wildfires. The photo was taken on June 16.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Halt weapons to Myanmar

UN General Assembly passes resolution; division emerges in Asean

REUTERS

The United Nations General Assembly has called for a stop to the flow of arms to Myanmar and urged the military to respect November election results and release political detainees, including leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The General Assembly adopted a resolution with the support of 119 countries several months after the military overthrew Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in a Feb. 1 coup. Belarus requested the text be put to a vote and was the only country to oppose it, while 36 abstained, including China and Russia.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but carry political weight.

"The risk of a large-scale civil war is real," UN special envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener told the General Assembly after the vote. "Time is of the essence. The opportunity to reverse the military takeover is narrowing."

European Union UN Ambassador Olof Skoog said the UN resolution sends a powerful message: "It delegitimizes the military junta, condemns its abuse and violence against its own people



and demonstrates its isolation in the eyes of the world."

The military cited the government's refusal to address what it said was fraud in a November election as the reason for the coup. International observers have said the ballot was fair.

An initial draft UN resolution included stronger language calling for an arms embargo on Myanmar. According to a proposal seen by Reuters last

month, nine Southeast Asian countries wanted that language removed.

The compromise text "calls on all member states to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar."

The junta's forces have killed more than 860 people since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. The junta says the number is much lower.

The General Assembly also called on Myanmar to swiftly implement a five-point consensus the junta forged with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in April to halt violence and start dialogue with its opponents.

Asean has led the main diplomatic effort to find a way out of the crisis, but was split on Friday over the UN action.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar's UN Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, who speaks for the country's elected civilian government, voted yes, while Brunei, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand abstained.

## Ease curbs carefully

India asks states amid Covid 3rd wave fears

AGENCIES

India's central government yesterday urged states to be careful in reopening from Covid-19 lockdowns to prevent a resurgence of infections in the hard-hit country.

The statement comes as World Health Organization's chief scientist warned that the Delta variant of Covid-19, first identified in India, is becoming the globally dominant variant of the disease.

Indian states are easing restrictions as a second wave of coronavirus infections appears to abate. The country is second only to the United States in confirmed infections at 29.82 million, with 385,137 deaths.

States and territories "must ensure that the whole process is carefully calibrated," Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote in a letter to top provincial bureaucrats. India yesterday reported 60,753 new Covid-19 cases and 1,647 deaths over the past 24 hours, according to a government statement. A third wave of infections is likely to hit India by October, and although it will be better controlled than the last outbreak, the pandemic will remain a public health threat for at least another year, a Reuters poll of medical experts showed.

In Russia, Moscow yesterday reported a pandemic high for new coronavirus cases for the second consecutive day, as the city's hospitals are flooded with new patients due to the Delta variant. The city registered 9,120 new coronavirus infections in 24 hours.

Meanwhile, in US, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris urged Americans to get shots, as the country looks likely to miss the White House's goal of inoculating 70% of adults at least one dose of vaccine by next month. By July 4, the Independence Day holiday. As of Friday, around 65.1% of people in the US had gotten at least one shot.

## 'It's a home-made crisis'

EU warns Lebanon's leaders of sanctions

REUTERS, Beirut

The European Union's foreign policy chief yesterday told Lebanon's leaders they were to blame for the country's political and economic crisis and some could face sanctions if they continue to obstruct steps to form a new government and implement reform.

Speaking after what he called a "frank exchange" with President Michel Aoun, Josep Borrell said he was bringing a firm message that the country stood on the edge of financial collapse and politicians could not afford to waste more time.

"The crisis Lebanon is facing is a domestic crisis. It's a self-imposed crisis," he told reporters after talks with Aoun. "It's not a crisis coming from abroad or from external factors. It's a home-made crisis, a crisis done by yourselves."

Lebanon's currency has lost 90% of its value. More than half the population are living in poverty and struggling with rampant inflation, power blackouts and shortages of fuel and food.

The crisis has been exacerbated by political stalemate, with PM-designate Saad al-Hariri at loggerheads with Aoun for months over forming a new government capable of introducing reforms which could unlock desperately needed foreign aid.

"We stand ready to assist," Borrell said. "But if there is further obstruction to solutions to the current multi-dimensional crisis in the country, we will have to consider other courses of action... including targeted sanctions," he added.

## Raisi wins Iran vote

The harline cleric to replace Rouhani as president

AFP, Tehran

Ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi was yesterday declared the winner of Iran's presidential election, a widely anticipated result after many political heavyweights were barred from running.

Raisi won just shy of 62 percent of the vote in Friday's election, according to official figures, on a turnout of 48.8 percent, a record low for a presidential poll in the Islamic republic.

"I congratulate the people on their choice," said outgoing moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who has served the maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and leaves office in August.

Raisi, 60, is set to take over at a critical time, as Iran seeks to salvage its tattered nuclear deal with major powers and free itself from punishing US sanctions that have driven a sharp economic downturn.

"God willing, we will do our best so that the hope for the future now alive in people's hearts grows further," said Raisi, adding that he wants to strengthen public trust in the government for a "bright and

pleasant life together".

The head of the Iranian judiciary, whose black turban signifies direct descent from Islam's Prophet Mohammed, Raisi is seen as close to the 81-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who holds ultimate political power in Iran.

Khamenei hailed the election saying that "the great winner... is the Iranian nation because it has risen up once again in the face of the propaganda of the enemy's mercenary media".

Raisi, who holds deeply conservative views on many social issues including the role of women in public life, has been named in Iranian media as a possible successor to Khamenei.

To opposition and human rights groups, his name is linked to mass executions of political prisoners in 1988. The US government has sanctioned him over the purge, in which Raisi has denied involvement.

Rouhani's landmark achievement was the 2015 deal with world powers under which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.



Activist Alexandra Wong (C), also known as Grandma Wong, is dragged away by police inside the court grounds in Hong Kong yesterday, as executives from the city's pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper, chief editor Ryan Law and CEO Cheung Kim-hung, appear in court after they were charged with collusion over their newspaper's coverage after authorities deployed a sweeping security law.

PHOTO: AFP

## She was a 'trafficking victim'

Lawyer of British 'IS bride' Shamima Begum tells court

AFP, London

A schoolgirl who left Britain to join the so-called Islamic State group and had her British citizenship revoked was a victim of human trafficking, a court heard on Friday.

Shamima Begum was 15 when she travelled from London to Syria with two fellow pupils in February 2015.

Britain's interior ministry revoked her citizenship on national security grounds after she was discovered heavily pregnant in a Syrian refugee camp in February 2019, amid an outcry led by right-wing newspapers.

The Court of Appeal ruled last July that Begum could return to Britain to challenge the decision. But the Supreme Court in February overturned the lower court ruling, and prevented her from doing so on national security grounds.

Begum, now 21, is challenging the interior ministry's decision at



the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) that deals with deportations on national security grounds and the revocation of citizenship.

Her lawyer, Samantha Knights, claimed Begum was "a child trafficked to and remaining in Syria for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced marriage".

She also argued that revoking Begum's citizenship left her stateless. The court was told Begum was living in a "dire" and "fundamentally unsafe environment in which

violence is endemic" in the al-Roj refugee camp in northern Syria.

Knights added there was a "serious and present danger" to Begum after the media located her whereabouts and due to her engagement with Western legal processes. The lawyer argued against delaying her appeal until the conclusion of a separate case in March 2022.

Begum is of Bangladeshi heritage but the country's foreign minister has said he will not consider granting her citizenship.

An estimated 900 Britons travelled to Syria and Iraq to join IS. The government has prosecuted returnees and revoked more than 150 people's citizenship, with unconfirmed numbers stuck in Syria.

SIAC judge Robert Jay said he would give a ruling by the end of June.

## WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORT

### US pulls antimissile batteries from ME

AGENCIES

The Biden administration is withdrawing Patriot antimissile batteries from four Middle East countries as the US reduces its military footprint in the region amid a reduction in tensions with Iran, a US news outlet reported on Friday.

The Pentagon is pulling about eight Patriot antimissile batteries from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and Jordan, as well as a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system from Saudi Arabia that had been deployed by the previous Trump administration, the Wall Street Journal reported citing unnamed US officials.

The redeployment includes hundreds of US troops who operate the systems and began earlier this month following a June 2 phone call in which US informed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of the shift, according to the Journal.

The withdrawal of anti-missile batteries marks a return to a more normal level of defence in the region where the US continues to maintain tens of thousands of troops even as it has reduced forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, the Journal reported. The US deployed Patriot antimissile batteries and troops to Saudi Arabia after Iranian drone attacks hit Saudi oil facilities and to Iraq in 2020 after a spate of missile and rocket attacks on US forces by Iran and Iranian-backed militias.



(JUNE 19)

1937 - The Scottish dramatist and novelist JM Barrie, creator of Peter Pan, died.

1997 - Musical "Cats" makes Broadway history, completing longest ever run in New York.

2000 - Dutch police link warehouse to deaths of dozens of illegal Chinese immigrants who suffocated in a truck in the English port of Dover.

2007 - A suspected al Qaeda bomber killed 78 people in Baghdad when he rammed a truck into a Shia mosque.

2008 - European Union states agreed to scrap sanctions against Cuba in a move aimed at encouraging democratic reforms on the Communist island.

2012 - Wikileaks founder Julian Assange seeks political asylum in Ecuador's embassy in London.

SOURCE: REUTERS



Quote of the day

AGENCIES

India's central government yesterday urged states to be careful in reopening from Covid-19 lockdowns to prevent a resurgence of infections in the hard-hit country.

The statement comes as World Health Organization's chief scientist warned that the Delta variant of Covid-19, first identified in India, is becoming the globally dominant variant of the disease.

Indian states are easing restrictions as a second wave of coronavirus infections appears to abate. The country is second only to the United States in confirmed infections at 29.82 million, with 385,137 deaths.

States and territories "must ensure that the whole process is carefully calibrated," Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote in a letter to top provincial bureaucrats. India yesterday reported 60,753 new Covid-19 cases and 1,647 deaths over the past 24 hours, according to a government statement.

A third wave of infections is likely to hit India by October, and although it will be better controlled than the last outbreak, the pandemic will remain a public health threat for at least another year, a Reuters poll of medical experts showed.

In Russia, Moscow yesterday reported a pandemic high for new coronavirus cases for the second consecutive day, as the city's hospitals are flooded with new patients due to the Delta variant. The city registered 9,120 new coronavirus infections in 24 hours.

Meanwhile, in US, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris urged Americans to get shots, as the country looks likely to miss the White House's goal of inoculating 70% of adults at least one dose of vaccine by next month. By July 4, the Independence Day holiday. As of Friday, around 65.1% of people in the US had gotten at least one shot.

The European Union's foreign policy chief yesterday told Lebanon's leaders they were to blame for the country's political and economic crisis and some could face sanctions if they continue to obstruct steps to form a new government and implement reform.

Speaking after what he called a "frank exchange" with President Michel Aoun, Josep Borrell said he was bringing a firm message that the country stood on the edge of financial collapse and politicians could not afford to waste more time.

"The crisis Lebanon is facing is a domestic crisis. It's a self-imposed crisis," he told reporters after talks with Aoun. "It's not a crisis coming from abroad or from external factors. It's a home-made crisis, a crisis done by yourselves."

Lebanon's currency has lost 90% of its value. More than half the population are living in poverty and struggling with rampant inflation, power blackouts and shortages of fuel and food.

The crisis has been exacerbated by political stalemate, with PM-designate Saad al-Hariri at loggerheads with Aoun for months over forming a new government capable of introducing reforms which could unlock desperately needed foreign aid.

"We stand ready to assist," Borrell said. "But if there is further obstruction to solutions to the current multi-dimensional crisis in the country, we will have to consider other courses of action... including targeted sanctions," he added.

The head of the Iranian judiciary, whose black turban signifies direct descent from Islam's Prophet Mohammed, Raisi is seen as close to the 81-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who holds ultimate political power in Iran.

Khamenei hailed the election saying that "the great winner... is the Iranian nation because it has risen up once again in the face of the propaganda of the enemy's mercenary media".

Raisi, who holds deeply conservative views on many social issues including the role of women in public life, has been named in Iranian media as a possible successor to Khamenei.

To opposition and human rights groups, his name is linked to mass executions of political prisoners in 1988. The US government has sanctioned him over the purge, in which Raisi has denied involvement.

Rouhani's landmark achievement was the 2015 deal with world powers under which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

Her lawyer, Samantha Knights, claimed Begum was "a child trafficked to and remaining in Syria for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced marriage".

She also argued that revoking Begum's citizenship left her stateless. The court was told Begum was living in a "dire" and "fundamentally unsafe environment in which

violence is endemic" in the al-Roj refugee camp in northern Syria.

Knights added there was a "serious and present danger" to Begum after the media located her whereabouts and due to her engagement with Western legal processes. The lawyer argued against delaying her appeal until the conclusion of a separate case in March 2022.

Begum is of Bangladeshi heritage but the country's foreign minister has said he will not consider granting her citizenship.

An estimated 900 Britons travelled to Syria and Iraq to join IS. The government has prosecuted returnees and revoked more than 150 people's citizenship, with unconfirmed numbers stuck in Syria.

SIAC judge Robert Jay said he would give a ruling by the end of June.

The Biden administration is withdrawing Patriot antimissile batteries from four Middle East countries as the US reduces its military footprint in the region amid a reduction in tensions with Iran, a US news outlet reported on Friday.

The Pentagon is pulling about eight Patriot antimissile batteries from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and Jordan, as well as a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system from Saudi Arabia that had been deployed by the previous Trump administration, the Wall Street Journal reported citing unnamed US officials.

The redeployment includes hundreds of US troops who operate the systems and began earlier this month following a June 2 phone call in which US informed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of the shift, according to the Journal.

The withdrawal of anti-missile batteries marks a return to a more normal level of defence in the region where the US continues to maintain tens of thousands of troops even as it has reduced forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, the Journal reported. The US deployed Patriot antimissile batteries and troops to Saudi Arabia after Iranian drone attacks hit Saudi oil facilities and to Iraq in 2020 after a spate of missile and rocket attacks on US forces by Iran and Iranian-backed militias.

The risk of a large-scale civil war is real... Time is of the essence. The opportunity to reverse the military takeover is narrowing.

CHRISTINE SCHRANER BURGNER, UN SPECIAL ENVOY ON MYANMAR, TELLS MEMBER STATES AT UN