

NEWS
IN *brief*

Ghani to visit White House

Afghan leader Ashraf Ghani and the head of the country's peace process will meet President Joe Biden at the White House on Friday, as the planned American military withdrawal accelerates. Biden has ordered the withdrawal of all US forces from Afghanistan by this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks that triggered the invasion. In moving to end America's longest war, the president said he believes that no more can be achieved. "The visit by President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Afghanistan as the military drawdown continues," spokeswoman Jen Psaki said. As the US military presses ahead to meet the September 11 deadline, the Taliban have fought daily battles with government forces 40 districts.



Armenia PM claims victory

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's party won 53.9 percent of the vote in snap parliamentary polls called in an effort to defuse a political crisis after a war with Azerbaijan, official results showed yesterday. An alliance led by his rival, ex-leader Robert Kocharyan, came second with 21 percent, according to the results based on ballots from 100 percent of precincts counted. A winning party or bloc needs to obtain at least 50 percent of seats plus one and can be assigned additional seats in order to form a government.



Swedish PM Lofven ousted

Sweden's parliament ousted Prime Minister Stefan Lofven in a no-confidence vote yesterday, giving the Social Democrat leader a week to resign and hand the speaker the job of finding a new government, or call a snap election. The nationalist Sweden Democrats had seized the chance to call the vote after the formerly communist Left Party withdrew support for the centre-left government over a plan to ease rent controls for new-build apartments. Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson told parliament the government was harmful and historically weak, adding: "It should never have come into power." The no-confidence motion, which required 175 votes in the 349-seat parliament to pass, was supported by 181 lawmakers.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



This aerial picture shows a funeral taking place at a cemetery for Covid-19 coronavirus victims in Jakarta, Indonesia yesterday. Indonesia passed two million coronavirus cases yesterday as infection rates soar and hospitals are flooded with new patients, prompting warnings that the Southeast Asian nation's health crisis could spiral out of control.

PHOTO: AFP

World in worst
cascade of
rights setbacks
Says UN rights chief

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief yesterday called for "concerted action" to help recover from the worst global deterioration of rights seen in decades, highlighting situations in China, Russia and Ethiopia among others.

"To recover from the most wide-reaching and severe cascade of human rights setbacks in our lifetimes, we need a life-changing vision, and concerted action," Michelle Bachelet told the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's 47th session.

"Extreme poverty, inequalities and injustice are rising. Democratic and civic space is being eroded," she warned. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights voiced deep concern about a number of country situations.

She said she was "deeply disturbed" by reports of "serious violations" in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, wracked by war and with some 350,000 people threatened by famine. She pointed to "extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual violence against children as well as adults, and forced displacement", and said she had "credible reports" that Eritrean soldiers were still operating in the region. The UN rights chief also pointed to the "chilling impact" of a sweeping national security law introduced in Hong Kong.

US violated 2015 nuclear deal
Says Iran's President-Elect Raisi, rules out meeting Biden

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian President-Elect Ebrahim Raisi said yesterday that the United States violated the 2015 nuclear deal and the European Union failed to fulfil its commitments, speaking in his first news conference since his victory in Friday's election.

He flatly rejected meeting US President Joe Biden, even if Washington removed all sanctions.

The US and the EU should fulfil their pledges under the deal, Raisi said in Tehran.

The president-elect said Iran's foreign policy priority would be improving ties with Gulf Arab neighbours, while calling on regional rival Saudi Arabia to halt its intervention in Yemen immediately.

Raisi, 60, a hardliner and strident critic of the West, will take over from pragmatist Hassan Rouhani in August as Iran seeks to salvage the tattered nuclear deal and be rid of punishing US sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy.



Raisi said Iranian foreign policy would not be limited to the nuclear deal. "Iran wants interaction with the world... My government's priority will be improving ties with our neighbours in the region," he told his first news conference in Tehran, televised by state media, since winning Friday's election.

But he called on Saudi Arabia "and its allies should immediately stop their interference in Yemen".

A Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen's war in 2015 after Iran-backed Houthi forces drove its government out of the capital Sanaa. The conflict has been largely

stalelated for several years.

Iranian and Western officials alike say Raisi's rise is unlikely to alter Iran's negotiating stance in talks to revive the nuclear deal - Iran's hardline Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei already has final say on all major policy.

Negotiations have been ongoing in Vienna since April to work out how Iran and the United States can both return to compliance with the nuclear pact, which Washington abandoned in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump and then reimposed sanctions on Iran.

Iran has subsequently breached the deal's limits on enrichment of uranium, designed to minimise the risk of it developing nuclear weapons potential. Tehran has long denied having any such ambition.

Raisi said Iran's ballistic missile programme was non-negotiable, despite demands by the West and Gulf Arab countries that it be included in the ongoing talks to revive the nuclear agreement.

Russia, Myanmar agree
to bolster bilateral ties

AFP, Moscow

Myanmar's junta leader and a senior Russia security official yesterday committed to improving ties between their two countries, Russia's Security Council said in a statement.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy government in February.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has travelled to Moscow for a three-day international security conference kicking off today which brings together defence officials from across the globe.

Russia's Security Council said its chief Nikolai Patrushev had met with Min Aung Hlaing and discussed the "fight against terrorism, issues related to regional security" and foreign interference in Myanmar.

The officials "reaffirmed their desire to further strengthen bilateral cooperation" between Russia and Myanmar, it added.

This is Min Aung Hlaing's second known trip abroad since he seized power.

Myanmar state television on Sunday reported that the junta chief was attending the conference in Russia, an ally and major arms supplies to the Myanmar military. The junta's brutal crackdown on dissent has since killed at least 870 civilians since the February coup, according to a local monitoring group.

Min Aung Hlaing's visit comes after the UN General Assembly took the rare step on Friday of calling on member states to "prevent the flow of arms" into Myanmar. The resolution -- which did not go so far as to call for a global arms embargo -- also demands that the military "immediately stop all violence against peaceful demonstrators."



(JUNE 22)

1940 - France's General Charles Huntziger signed the terms of surrender with Germany at Compiègne in World War Two, in the same railway carriage in which General Foch had received the German surrender in 1918.

2001 - Turkey's Constitutional Court banned the main opposition Islamist Virtue Party for anti-secular activity.

2011 - Dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei released on bail.

2015 - Afghanistan parliament members are evacuated during attack.

SOURCE: REUTERS

‘Irresponsible gameplan’
Trinamool on BJP claims of fresh statehood call

NDTV ONLINE

A statehood movement is building up in Jangalmahal, the forested area in the western part of Bengal, a BJP leader has claimed days after a couple of his party colleagues demanded that a separate Union Territory be carved out of north Bengal.

But while Jangalmahal lies over the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Jhargram, BJP MP Soumitra Khan has said the demand for statehood has spilled over to other districts as well. His list includes Birbhum, Burdwan, Asansol, East and West Midnapore.

Saumitra Khan, MP from the Bishnupur seat who is currently in New Delhi, said people in the region were frustrated by the lack of jobs and development and worried that the way Mamata Banerjee calls top leaders of the country "outsiders". There is concern that she might label people living in Jangalmahal outsiders too one day, he said.

"Our demand is Mamata should withdraw this word... outsider. Otherwise, one day she may even call us outsiders," he said.

The state's ruling Trinamool Congress has accused BJP of brewing trouble after failing to come to power in the state in the recently concluded assembly elections. Party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh has called it "irresponsible gameplan by the BJP".

The BJP has a strong base in north Bengal that bucked the trend in the recent assembly election and voted for the party. In the recent elections, the BJP had also focussed on Jangalmahal, which was part of the Maoist corridor during the first term of the Mamata Banerjee government.

Several BJP leaders have already spoken of a broader statehood demand in north Bengal, which has seen the Gorkhaland agitation since the 1980s.

On June 15, a couple of BJP MPs flagged a controversial demand to carve out a Union Territory comprising several districts of North Bengal during a closed-door meeting of party MP for Alipurduar, John Barla.

"I made the demand ... there have been movements here for a separate Kamtapuri, a greater Cooch Behar and for Gorkhaland," John Barla was quoted as saying by news agency Press Trust of India. "My belief is that North Bengal should be detached and made into a separate union territory," Barla had said, alleging that the entire area is being neglected by the government.



Pro-independence demonstrators gather during a protest as Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez delivers his speech at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Spain yesterday to outline his government's plans to pardon the jailed Catalan separatists behind a failed 2017 independence bid.

PHOTO: AFP

CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON UYGHURS

Pak PM Imran Khan mum

AGENCIES

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan repeatedly refused to acknowledge China's repression of Uyghur Muslims during an interview with "Axios on HBO," deflecting to other global human rights issues and citing China's denial of the crackdown in Xinjiang.

He also asked why the world was fixated on Xinjiang while ignoring what India was doing in Kashmir.

The comments have generated debate on Indian and Pakistani social media. The interview with Khan was aired early yesterday morning and immediately started gaining traction as people began discussing his comments.

Khan told the interviewer, Jonathan Swan, that he would "absolutely not" allow the US to have the CIA in Pakistan to conduct cross border



counter-terrorism missions against al-Qaeda, the Islamic State group, and the Taliban.

Pakistan's cooperation is seen as critical to US President Joe Biden's plans to completely withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by September.

Khan has always been opposed to the US using Pakistan as a base from which to launch operations, and his comments follow similar remarks

made by Pakistani government officials.

But his comments on China, Xinjiang and the treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority have not been welcomed as enthusiastically.

Reiterating that Pakistan spoke to the Chinese on any issues they had "behind closed doors", Khan asked why what India was doing in Kashmir - which he likened to an "open-air prison camp" - was not an issue, calling it a matter of "hypocrisy". Khan said that Pakistan "respect[s] the way they [China] are and whatever issues we have we speak behind closed doors".

He said that China has been one of the "greatest friends" to Pakistan at its most difficult times, adding that "when we were really struggling and our economy was struggling they came to our rescue".

‘It’s getting harder and harder’

Adviser to jailed HK tycoon says Apple Daily to shut within days

REUTERS, HONG KONG

Hong Kong pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily will be forced to shut "in a matter of days" after authorities froze the company's assets under a national security law, an adviser to jailed owner Jimmy Lai told Reuters yesterday.

The closure of Apple Daily would undermine the former British colony's reputation as an open and free society and send a warning to other companies that could be accused of colluding with a foreign country, media advocacy groups said.

Next Digital, publisher of the top-selling 26-year-old newspaper, was set to hold a board meeting yesterday to discuss how to move forward after its lines of credit were

frozen, the adviser, Mark Simon, said.

"Vendors tried to put money into our accounts and were rejected," he said by phone from the United States.



"We thought we'd be able to make it to the end of the month. It's just getting harder and harder. It's essentially a matter of days."

Apple Daily said on Sunday the freezing of its assets had left the liberal newspaper with cash for "a

few weeks" for normal operations." Chief Editor Ryan Law, 47, and Chief Executive Cheung Kim-hung, 59, were denied bail on Saturday after being charged with collusion with a foreign country.

Three other executives were also arrested on Thursday when 500 police officers raided the newspaper's offices, drawing condemnation from Western nations, global rights groups and the UN spokesperson for human rights.

Those three are still under investigation but were released from police detention.

Hong Kong and Chinese officials said press freedom cannot be used as a "shield" for those who commit crimes, and slammed the criticism as "meddling."