

Quotes of the day



“They (Big Techs) bury or buy rivals and abuse their monopoly power, conduct that is harmful to consumers, competition, innovation and our democracy.”

US REPRESENTATIVE **DAVID CICILLINE** AS CONGRESS BACKS REGULATIONS AGAINST TECH GIANTS



“We must also seek direct contact with Russia and the Russian president. It is not enough for the American president to talk to the Russian president.”

GERMAN CHANCELLOR **ANGELA MERKEL**



June 25

1950 - North Korea invaded the South, heralding the beginning of the Korean War.

1991 - Croatia and Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia, plunging the federation into a violent breakup.

1998 - World's first consumer copy of Microsoft Windows 98 sold in Sydney.

2005 - Ultra-conservative Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad swept to a stunning landslide in Iran's presidential run-off against former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

2009 - Pop star Michael Jackson died.

SOURCE: REUTERS



People dance to celebrate Midsummer Eve during sunset at the Amager Strandpark in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

EU divided over Russia summit plan

Members urge caution as France, Germany say direct contact with Putin needed for Europe's stability

REUTERS, Brussels

France and Germany yesterday called for a European Union summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin but met firm resistance from Poland and Baltic countries who distrust the Kremlin.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the first EU summit with Putin since January 2014 would be a chance for dialogue and won support from Austria's chancellor as EU leaders arrived for their regular summer meeting in Brussels to discuss a new strategy to improve ties with Moscow.

“We need a dialogue to defend our interests... it is a dialogue necessary for the stability of the European continent,” Macron said.

“We cannot remain in a purely reactive logic when it comes to Russia,” he said. “I hope that we can, with real European unity and coordination, have this ...dialogue.”

“We as the European Union must also seek direct contact with Russia and the Russian president. It is not enough for the US president to talk to the Russian president,” Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel said ahead of the summit.

EU leaders are also set to ask the European Commission and the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell for “options for additional restrictive measures, including economic sanctions” against Russia, according to a draft of the summit statement seen by

Reuters.

After Nato warnings that Russia is trying to divide Western democracies through disinformation and covert attacks, many EU countries said talk of summits was premature. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said the idea was like “trying to engage the bear to keep a pot of honey safe”.

The Kremlin welcomed the idea of a summit, saying both Brussels and Moscow needed dialogue.

On opposing sides in standoffs in Ukraine and Belarus, and at odds over human rights, the EU and Russia accuse each other of meddling in elections, disinformation and threatening security and stability from the Baltics to the Black Sea.

The EU yesterday imposed economic sanctions on Belarus, an ally of Russia that the Kremlin sees as a buffer state between Russia and Nato.

The new package looks to hit key sources of revenue for the authorities in Minsk by restricting trade in potash fertiliser, petroleum and tobacco products, a statement said. It limits access for Belarus to the EU's capital markets and bans providing insurance to government and public bodies.

There is also a prohibition on the sale of technology to Belarus that could be used to intercept phone or internet communications and “dual-use” military equipment that could be used to crack down on demonstrators.

» EU imposes sanctions on key Belarus sectors

» New sanctions on Russia also on the table

Pandemic fallout to be felt 'for years'

Warns UN drug agency

AFP, Vienna

The coronavirus pandemic is pushing more people into drug use, while illicit cultivation could also get a boost, the UN said Thursday, warning that the crisis's fallout was likely to be felt “for years to come”.

The Vienna-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which each year pulls together data from its wide network of member countries in its annual report, said it also feared illicit opium poppy and coca leaf cultivation could rise as the economic crisis caused by the pandemic led to joblessness and other problems around the globe.

“The new report shows that drug markets have swiftly resumed operations after the initial disruption at the onset of the pandemic” last year, a statement by agency said.

Top opium producer Afghanistan reported a 37 percent jump in the amount of land used for illicit poppy cultivation during 2020 compared with the previous year, the report said.

Inequality, poverty and mental health conditions -- known factors that push people into drug use -- are also on the rise globally, it said in a chapter entitled “Covid-19 fallout likely to be felt in drug markets for years to come”.

Most countries have reported a rise in the use of cannabis during the pandemic, it said, noting generally people increasingly saw risks in its use.

The crisis has also seen an increase in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs, while consumption of drugs that are “typically used in social settings”, such as cocaine, has dropped.

In a positive development seen by UNODC the area under coca bush cultivation declined globally by five percent in 2019.

This was largely driven by the first significant fall in cultivation in six years in Colombia though the South American country continued to be by far the largest source of cocaine globally.

NEWS

IN brief

EU MPs pass climate law

The European Parliament on Thursday approved a landmark law to make the European Union's greenhouse gas emissions targets legally binding, paving the way for a policy overhaul to cut planet-warming pollution faster. Negotiators from Parliament and the EU's 27 member countries reached a deal in April on the climate law, which puts tougher emissions-cutting targets at the heart of EU policymaking. The bill sets targets to reduce net EU emissions by 55% by 2030, from 1990 levels, and eliminate net emissions by 2050.



Philippines' ex-president Aquino dies

Former Philippine president Benigno “Noy” Aquino, the reserved 61-year-old bachelor from one of Asia's most famous political families, died yesterday, the country's foreign minister and several officials said. Aquino, who ruled the archipelago nation from 2010 to 2016, was the only son of the late former president Corazon Aquino and her assassinated husband, senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino. Aquino died in a Manila hospital of renal failure as a result of diabetes, his family said.

Trudeau survives vote of no confidence

The minority government of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau survived a parliamentary vote of no confidence Wednesday in a face-off over the proposed budget, eliminating the possibility of early elections this summer. The House of Commons voted 211 to 121 in favor of approving the budget, which was proposed in April and contains a plan to spend CANS\$101.4 billion over three years. The conservative opposition voted together against Trudeau, who was able to hang on thanks to the support of three other smaller blocs in the lower chamber.



World's highest hotel opens

The world's highest luxury hotel, boasting a restaurant on the 120th floor and 24-hour personal butler service, has opened in Shanghai to guests with deep pockets and a head for heights. Elevators whizz guests up the intimidating spiral-like skyscraper at ear-popping speeds of 18 metres per second to the J Hotel's 165 opulent rooms. The hotel occupies the top floors of the 632-metre Shanghai Tower in the city's financial district, the second-tallest building in the world after Dubai's Burj Khalifa. Its opening was delayed partly by the coronavirus pandemic but the hotel has now started receiving guests at any hour.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

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A 'victim of tyranny'

Says Apple Daily as Hong Kongers snap up final edition

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's pro-democracy Apple Daily tabloid said it was a “victim of tyranny” in a defiant final edition yesterday after it was forced to close under a new national security law, ending a 26-year run of taking on China's authoritarian leaders.

The sudden death of the popular newspaper is the latest blow to Hong Kong's freedoms, deepening unease over whether the international finance centre can remain a media hub as China seeks to stamp out dissent.

Queues formed across Hong Kong yesterday as residents raced to snap up one of the one million copies Apple Daily said it planned to print. Many vendors sold out within minutes and were awaiting fresh deliveries.

The swansong front page featured the paper's own journalists waving goodbye to crowds outside its headquarters.

“Apple Daily is dead,” deputy chief editor Chan Pui-man, who was arrested last week on a national security charge, wrote in a farewell letter to readers.

“Press freedom became the victim of tyranny.”

In the working-class district of Mongkok, hundreds queued through the early hours of the morning to get their hands on the final edition, some chanting “Apple Daily we will meet again!”

“It's very shocking,” a 30-year-old woman, who was in the queue and gave

her first name as Candy, told AFP.

“Within two weeks, authorities could use this national security law to dismantle a listed company.”

Hong Kong's most popular tabloid had long been a thorn in Beijing's side, with unapologetic support for the city's pro-democracy movement and caustic criticism of China's authoritarian leaders.

Those same leaders used a new security law to bring about its rapid demise.

Owner Jimmy Lai, currently in jail for attending democracy protests, was among the first to be charged under the law after its imposition last year.

But the final chapter was written over the last week when authorities deployed the security law to raid the newsroom, arrest senior executives and freeze its assets.

That last move crippled the paper's ability to conduct business or pay staff and the news group decided yesterday's newspaper would be its last.

Overnight it took down its website, Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Its edition in Taiwan will continue to operate. But some 1,000 people, including 700 journalists, are now out of work.

“Hong Kongers lost a media organisation that dared to speak up and insist on defending the truth,” eight local journalist associations said in a joint statement.

China imposed its security law on Hong Kong last year after the city was convulsed by huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019.