

NEWS IN brief

India tests new nuke-capable ballistic missile

India yesterday successfully tested a new nuclear-capable ballistic missile with a range between 1,000km and 2,000km. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the new generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile Agni P from Dr A P J Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Bay of Bengal in eastern state of Odisha, the Indian Defence Ministry said. Agni P, an advanced variant of Agni class of missiles, is a canisterised missile which can be launched from rail and road as per operational requirements, Defence Ministry officials said.

US launch Black Sea drills

Ukraine and the United States launched joint naval exercises in the Black Sea yesterday in a show of Western cooperation with Kiev as it faces off with Russia. The drills come just days after the British navy's HMS Defender passed near Russian-annexed Crimea in the Black Sea, with Moscow saying it fired warning shots at the destroyer to ward it off. The Sea Breeze drills -- which have taken place 21 times since 1997 -- will involve some 5,000 military personnel from more than 30 countries. The exercises will last two weeks and involve around 30 ships, including the missile destroyer USS Ross.

Prominent HK writer arrested

Hong Kong police arrested the lead opinion writer of Apple Daily on national security grounds as he tried to fly out of the city, local media reported, days after the pro-democracy newspaper was forced to shut down. Apple Daily, an unapologetic backer of Hong Kong's democracy movement, put out its last edition on Thursday after its top leadership was arrested and its assets frozen under a national security law China imposed on Hong Kong last year. Fung Wai-kong, 57, managing editor and chief opinion writer for the paper's English website, on Sunday became the seventh senior Apple Daily figure detained under the law.



US condo death toll hits 9

The death toll after the collapse of a Florida apartment tower rose to nine, officials said, with more than 150 people still missing and their weary families waiting nearly four days for information as to their fate. The outlook grew increasingly grim by the hour, however, as the slow rescue operation, involving workers sorting nonstop through the rubble in torrid heat and high humidity, carried on. The 12-story oceanfront Champlain Towers South pancaked in the middle of the night Thursday as residents slept. Surveillance video of the collapse showed it coming down in just a few seconds.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



The Baihetan hydropower plant is seen in operation on the border between Qiaojia county of Yunnan province and Ningnan county of Sichuan province, yesterday. The 289-metre (948 feet) high Baihetan Hydropower Station in southwest China, second in the world only to the country's Three Gorges Dam in terms of power generation, began partial operation yesterday morning, state media reported. Baihetan was built with a total installed capacity of 16,000 megawatts.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Quotes of the day



Israel has some serious reservations about the Iran nuclear deal that is being put together.

ISRAEL'S FM YAIR LAPID



We've got to get a kind of wartime mentality here. We can't afford to have 10 years of lawsuits and pretend we're going to deal with this (climate) issue.

US CLIMATE ENVOY JOHN KERRY

Delta variant surge causes havoc

Moscow reimposes curbs; Asia-Pacific outbreaks flare; S Africa hardens lockdown

AGENCIES

Work-from-home restrictions were reimposed in Moscow yesterday as Russia tried to contain a deadly coronavirus wave fuelled by the Delta variant, while several Asian nations also tightened curbs to contain growing outbreaks.

While many wealthy countries have brought down infections through rapid vaccinations, outbreaks are still raging from Thailand and Indonesia to South America -- many fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant that was first detected in India.

Russia has seen an explosion of new cases in the last two weeks because of this variant, with its largest cities Moscow and Saint Petersburg posting record deaths yesterday for the second consecutive day.

Covid-19 is known to have claimed nearly four million lives worldwide since it first emerged in China in late 2019, and it is still spreading with multiple variants now in circulation. The Delta variant is now in 85 countries and is the most contagious of any identified so far, according to the

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

India overtakes US in total number of vaccines administered

New Delhi reports 3,129 deaths from 'black fungus'

Italy drops mask rules

World Health Organization.

The virus also remained on the march across the Asia-Pacific.

Thailand from yesterday reimposed restrictions on restaurants, construction sites and gatherings in the capital Bangkok and its suburbs because of a spike in cases.

Indonesia is battling one of the worst outbreaks in Asia, reporting a daily record 21,000 new cases on Sunday.

To the south, Australia was also fighting fresh outbreaks spurred by the Delta variant in areas not used to living under strict Covid-19 rules.

Residents of the country's biggest city Sydney are under stay-at-home orders for two weeks. And in Darwin in the north a 48-hour lockdown -- due to end today -- was extended to Friday after a cluster linked to an outbreak gold mine grew to seven cases.

Fresh restrictions were also announced Sunday in South Africa, where President Cyril Ramaphosa said "health facilities are stretched to the limit".

India yesterday said it has achieved another milestone in Covid-19 vaccination drive by overtaking the USA in total number of vaccine doses administered. The Health Ministry said a total of 32.36 crore vaccine doses have been administered so far under the nationwide vaccination drive that began on January 16.

Meanwhile, Indian Health Minister Harsh Vardhan yesterday said a total of 3,129 people have died of mucormycosis (black fungus) infections in India so far.

In Europe, all of Italy became a mask-free, "low-risk" zone from yesterday, a day after Spain took similar decision.

EU climate change law passes final hurdle

REUTERS, Brussels

European Union countries on Monday gave the final seal of approval to a law to make the bloc's greenhouse gas emissions targets legally binding, as EU policymakers prepare a huge new package of policies to fight climate change.

Negotiators from Parliament and EU member states reached a deal in April on the climate law, which sets targets to reduce net EU emissions by 55% by 2030, from 1990 levels, and eliminate them by 2050.

Ministers from the 27 EU countries formally approved the deal on Monday, except for Bulgaria, which abstained. Leaders from all EU countries signed up to the 2030 emissions-cutting target in December, which aim to put the bloc on a pathway that, if followed globally, would avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

The law aims to put climate at the heart of all EU policymaking, ensuring that future regulations support the emissions-cutting aims. Doing that will require a huge policy overhaul. Most EU laws are designed to meet a previous target to cut emissions by 40% by 2030.

The European Commission will begin that upgrade on July 14, when it proposes a dozen policies to reshape industry, energy, transport and housing sectors. The proposals will include EU carbon market reforms, tougher CO2 standards for new cars, and more ambitious renewable energy targets.



A man rests in a cooling center at the Oregon Convention Center on Sunday in Portland, Oregon. Swathes of the United States and Canada endured record-setting heat on Sunday, forcing schools and Covid-19 testing centers to close and the suspension of an Olympic athletics qualifying event, with forecasters warning of worse to come.

PHOTO: AFP

'Systemic racism needs systemic response'

UN rights chief calls on nations to come out of denial and dismantle it

REUTERS, Geneva

Racism against people of African descent remains systemic in many parts of the world, the UN human rights chief said yesterday, calling for states to dismantle discrimination and prosecute law enforcement officials for unlawful killings.

Michelle Bachelet, in a global report sparked by the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis in May 2020, said that police use of racial profiling and excessive force is entrenched in much of North America, Europe and Latin America.

Structural racism creates barriers to minorities' access to jobs, healthcare, housing, education and justice, she said.

"I am calling on all states to stop denying, and start dismantling, racism; to end impunity and build trust; to listen to the voices of people of African descent; and to confront past legacies and deliver redress," she said in the report to the Human Rights Council.

Bachelet welcomed a "promising initiative" by US President Joe Biden in signing an executive order in January to address racial inequity across the US. Her report cited 190 deaths of Africans and people of African descent worldwide at the hands of law enforcement officials who are "rarely held accountable".

"Racism and racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent are often rooted in policies and practices grounded in the debasement of the status of individuals in society," the report said. The scourge is most prevalent in countries with a legacy of slavery, it added.

"Systemic racism needs a systemic response," Bachelet said. "There is today a momentous opportunity to achieve a turning point for racial equality and justice."



JUNE 29

1941 - Polish concert pianist and statesman Ignace Jan Paderewski died. He campaigned abroad on behalf of Poland and was briefly prime minister in 1919.

1999 - The Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan was sentenced by a Turkish court to hang for treason.

2001 - Yugoslav Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic resigned, triggering the fall of the federal government over the transfer of Slobodan Milosevic to the war crimes court in The Hague.

2017 - Australian police charge Vatican's treasurer Cardinal George Pell with multiple sex offences.

SOURCE: REUTERS

'Blatant violation of sovereignty'

Iraq PM says his country not a playground for 'settling scores', slams deadly US strikes on pro-Iran fighters amid calls for revenge

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq yesterday condemned overnight US air strikes against Iran-backed armed groups on the Syrian-Iraqi border that killed at least seven fighters and sparked calls for revenge from Iraqi armed factions.

The second such raid on pro-Iran targets since US President Joe Biden took office, described by the Pentagon as "retaliatory", led to fears of a new escalation between Tehran and Washington and came despite faltering efforts to revive a key deal over Iran's nuclear programme.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi condemned the attack as a "blatant and unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty and Iraqi national security".

"Iraq reiterates its refusal to be an arena for settling scores," Kadhemi added in a statement, urging all sides to avoid any further escalation. The Hashed, an Iraqi paramilitary alliance

that includes several Iranian proxies and has become the main power broker in Baghdad, said the strikes killed four of its fighters in the Qaim region, some 13 kilometres (eight miles) away from the border.

The fighters were stationed there to prevent jihadists from infiltrating Iraq, the group said in a statement, denying that they had taken part in any attacks against US interests or personnel.

"We reserve the legal right to respond to these attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable on Iraqi soil," the Hashed said.

US defence spokesman John Kirby said in a statement that three military facilities used by Iran-backed militia had been hit overnight Sunday to Monday -- two in Syria and one in Iraq.

Kirby said the targets had been used by "Iran-backed militias that are engaged in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks against US personnel and facilities in Iraq".

At least six more fighters were wounded and

the targets included an arms depot near Albu Kamal, a Syrian town which lies where the border crosses the Euphrates river, a Britain-based monitor said. Syria's state-run SANA news agency said one child had been killed in the raid but gave few details.

US interests in Iraq, where 2,500 American troops are deployed as part of an international coalition to fight the jihadist Islamic State group, have been targeted in more than 40 attacks this year.

The vast majority have been bombs against logistics convoys, but rocket fire and drones packed with explosive have also been used in the assaults some of which were claimed by pro-Iran factions hoping to pressure Washington into withdrawing all its troops.

In February, US strikes on facilities in eastern Syria used by Iran-backed militia groups left more than 20 fighters dead, according to the Observatory.

'Emaciated' Kim causes 'tears and heartbreaks' in N Korea

AFP, Seoul

North Korean state television has aired a citizen's comment about Kim Jong Un's "emaciated" condition, a highly unusual broadcast in a country where public discussion of the leader's health and personal life has always been off-limits.

Analysts say the remarks showed authorities were seeking to use the change to Kim's weight to reinforce loyalty to the regime in desperate times.

Known as a heavy smoker, the leader has long been obese, with his weight appearing to increase steadily in recent years. But he looked noticeably less overweight in recent media images published by Pyongyang's official KCNA news agency and on state television.

Kim's personal life is normally taboo



for North Korea's state media but KCTV last week aired a clip of an unnamed resident of the capital claiming everyone in the country was "heartbroken" by his "emaciated" condition.

"Seeing our respected general secretary looking emaciated breaks our people's hearts the most," he said. "Everyone is talking about how their tears welled up immediately."

Analysts say Pyongyang is using Kim's appearance as a way to glorify him by portraying him as a "devoted, hardworking" leader as the country struggles to tackle its food crisis and other challenges.

Kim's father Kim Jong-Il and grandfather Kim Il-Sung were also obese and heavy smokers. Both died of heart attacks.