

Quote of the day



“WE’VE GAINED THE UPPER HAND AGAINST THIS VIRUS. BUT DON’T GET ME WRONG: COVID-19 HAS NOT BEEN VANQUISHED. WE ALL KNOW POWERFUL VARIANTS HAVE EMERGED, LIKE THE DELTA VARIANT.”

US PRESIDENT **JOE BIDEN** URGES AMERICANS TO HELP END COVID-19 PANDEMIC



People pick up free groceries from a food bank outside a supermarket amid the coronavirus disease pandemic, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia yesterday. The Southeast Asian country reported 6,387 new cases yesterday, bringing total infections to 785,039. Deaths from the virus totalled 5,497 as of Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS
IN brief

Iran's nuke plant back online

Iran's only nuclear power plant has been brought back online, its manager said early yesterday, after two weeks off-grid amid conflicting reports over an apparent regular maintenance operation. The “technical fault” that shut down the Bushehr plant and its 1,000-megawatt reactor on Iran's southern coast “was fixed”, Mahmoud Jafari, who is also deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), told ISNA news agency around midnight. That allowed the plant to resume power generation and be reconnected, he said. Jafari said power generation had resumed “from Sunday”, and urged Iranians to “help” the Islamic republic's overburdened grid by minimising power consumption as weather forecasts predicted rising temperatures in the coming days. The Bushehr plant was built by Russia and officially handed over in September 2013.

Gunmen kidnap 140 school students in Nigeria

Gunmen have kidnapped 140 students from a boarding school in northwestern Nigeria, a school official said yesterday, the latest in a wave of mass abductions targeting schoolchildren and students. Heavily-armed criminal gangs often attack villages to loot, steal cattle and abduct for ransom in northwest and central Nigeria, but since the start of the year they have increasingly targeted schools and colleges. The attackers scaled a fence to break into the Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna state in the early hours of Monday, taking away most of the 165 pupils boarding there overnight. Kaduna state police confirmed the early morning attack.

France warns of fourth wave

Lambda strain, deadlier than Delta, detected in over 30 countries

AGENCIES

France faces the risk of a fourth Covid-19 wave by the end of July due to the progression of the Delta variant of the virus, the country's health minister warned.

Olivier Veran said that in the last five days, cases of the Delta variant had increased and there was a grave possibility of the resumption of the pandemic.

“In France, even if we are at a low level of circulation of the virus, we have not completely crushed the epidemic, and it can start again quite quickly,” he was quoted as saying by BFM TV news on Sunday night.

Around 30% of new Covid-19 cases detected in the country are linked with the highly contagious Delta variant. According to the latest health data, around 2,549 new cases and nine deaths were recorded in the last 24 hours.

Citing the case of the UK, he said

the number of infections rose rapidly from “2,000 per day to nearly 25,000 per day in the space of four to five weeks.”

Veran added that France is in a position to avoid the possibility of a fourth wave with massive vaccination and social distancing restrictions.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The French government is mulling to make vaccination mandatory for caregivers and health workers employed in elderly homes, nursing homes and hospitals. A significant number of health workers have still not availed the vaccine.

There is also a consideration to extend the obligation of the vaccine to the rest of the population in order to achieve collective immunity as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's health ministry said a new Covid-19 strain

that is much more dangerous than the Delta variant has been detected in more than 30 countries in the past four weeks.

“The Lambda strain was reported to have originated from Peru, the country with the highest mortality rate in the world,” the ministry said in a tweet yesterday.

The ministry also linked to report by Australian news portal news.com.au saying the Lambda strain had been detected in the United Kingdom.

The portal reported that six cases of the Lambda strain have been detected in the UK to date. It noted that researchers are worried that this variant may be “more infectious than the Delta variant”.

Australian authorities trying to stamp out an outbreak in Sydney of the Delta variant said yesterday that the next two days would be “absolutely critical” in deciding whether to extend a stay-home order beyond July 9.

POST-COUP CRISIS IN MYANMAR

Junta bans executives of telcos from leaving

REUTERS, Singapore

Senior foreign executives of major telecommunications firms in Myanmar have been told by the junta that they must not leave the country without permission, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said.

A confidential order from Myanmar's Posts and Telecommunications Department (PTD) in mid-June said senior executives, both foreigners and Myanmar nationals, must seek special authorisation to leave the country, the person said.

A week later, telecom companies were sent a second letter telling them they had until Monday July 5 to fully implement intercept technology they had previously been asked to install to let authorities spy on calls, messages and web traffic and to track users by themselves, the source said. Reuters has not seen the orders. The directives follow pressure on the companies from the junta, which is facing daily protests from its opponents and a growing number of insurgencies to activate the spyware technology.

A spokesman for the military did not answer multiple requests for comment. The junta has never commented on the electronic surveillance effort, but announced soon after seizing power its aim to pass a cybersecurity bill that would require telecoms providers to provide data when requested and remove or block any content deemed to be disrupting “unity, stabilisation, and peace”.



Collapsed Florida condo demolished

The partially collapsed Miami-area condo where 24 people are confirmed dead was demolished on Sunday night, ahead of the possible arrival of Tropical Storm Elsa. Search-and-rescue efforts for 121 people missing have been suspended. Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters earlier on Sunday that rescue efforts would resume after the demolition, noting it was 11 days since the collapse. Video footage showed the 12-story building collapsing downward and throwing up plumes of smoke. As of Sunday afternoon, Tropical Storm Elsa was off the coast of Cuba with winds of 60 miles per hour (95 kph).

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A supporter of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) reacts as she is detained by police during a protest against, what the protesters claimed, fake vaccination camp during the ongoing coronavirus disease outbreak, in Kolkata, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

India behind June bomb blast in Lahore: Pak NSA

AP, Karachi

Pakistan's national security advisor has accused India of orchestrating last month's deadly car bombing in the eastern city of Lahore, saying Sunday that an investigation has shown it was organized by an Indian intelligence operative.

In a news conference in Islamabad, Moeed Yousuf said the probe showed that the man was an Indian citizen living in India who works for that country's RAW intelligence agency.

He did not name the alleged mastermind. “Through the forensic analysis, electronic equipment, which has been recovered from these terrorists, we have identified the main mastermind and the handlers of this terrorist attack.”

“And we have no doubt in informing you that the main mastermind belongs to RAW, lives in India and is an Indian citizen.”

He said Pakistan will continue its efforts to expose India's sponsorship of such attacks internationally.

The explosion took place outside the residence of anti-India militant leader Hafiz

Saeed, who himself has been designated a terrorist by the U.S. Justice Department and has a \$10 million bounty on his head.

India accuses Saeed of helping mastermind the deadly 2008 attacks in Mumbai that killed nearly 170 people at several occasions including the luxury Taj Hotel.

He was unharmed in the powerful explosion in Lahore's Johar Town neighborhood that killed three and wounded 24.

Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi couldn't be reached for comment.

India and Pakistan routinely accuse the other of carrying out clandestine attacks on the other's territory.

Saeed is a highly wanted suspect in India, and Pakistan has been criticized by India and the United States for not taking stronger actions against him.

Punjab police chief Inam Ghani said all those involved in the bombing have been arrested, including an Afghan who lived in Pakistan and actually parked the explosives-laden car at the site of blast.

MIGRANTS IN MEDITERRANEAN

Rescue ship picks up 200

AFP, Marseille

The migrant rescue ship Ocean Viking has rescued 203 people, including 67 minors, in recent days, its owner SOS Mediterranee said Sunday.

The migrants came from Egypt, Gambia, Libya, South Sudan, Syria and Tunisia, the non-governmental organisation said in comments posted on Twitter. They were rescued in four separate operations since Thursday.

In once rescue in the waters around Malta on Sunday, Ocean Viking picked up 71 migrants who were in an overloaded wooden boat that had embarked from Libya three days earlier, SOS Mediterranee said.

They had used up reserves of food and water and four people “had to be evacuated on stretchers”, the group added.

Since the start of the year, 886

migrants have died in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe, according to figures compiled by the International Organisation for Migration.

SOS Mediterranee says it has rescued more than 30,000 people since February 2016.

Meanwhile, at least 21 migrants died after the boat carrying them sank off the coast of Tunisia, a security official said, the second such disaster in two days in the region.

The coastguard recovered the bodies on Sunday off the port of Sfax, Colonel Houssein Jbebbi from the National Guard said.

On Saturday, at least 43 migrants drowned and another 84 were rescued after a shipwreck off Tunisia's coastal community of Zarzis.

Authorities said the migrants were trying to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy, reports Reuters.

150 Algeria bathers sick after sea polluted

AFP, Algiers

Nearly 150 people were hospitalised after swimming on Sunday in seawater suspected to have been polluted at Tenes in northwestern Algeria, a regional official said, quoted by local media.

Three beaches and a desalination plant have been closed and an investigation launched in Chlef, a locality that includes Tenes, the reports said.

Local government official Lakhdar Seddas told the privately owned Echourouk TV channel that “149 people suffered nausea, fever and redness of the eyes and were taken to hospital”.

Seddas said that around 50 people had since left hospital, and that polluted seawaters may have made them ill. Suspicions centred on a ship carrying livestock that had arrived recently at Tenes port, he added.

The website Ennahar Online named the ship as the Tanzanian-flagged Barhom II, and said it had arrived from the southern French port of Sete. Twenty-eight divers and seven civil defence workers who were sent to investigate were also reported to have become unwell.

An official statement said an environment ministry team had taken air and water samples from the port at Tenes, beaches and other locations.



Emergency personnel looks on as smoke rises from a plastic factory after an explosion in Samut Prakan, outside Bangkok, Thailand yesterday. The explosion killed at least one firefighter and wounding 29 people, officials said. PHOTO: REUTERS

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JULY 06

1919 - The first airship to cross the Atlantic, the British R-34, arrived in New York.

1942 - Diarist Anne Frank and her family took refuge from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

1994 - Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin pleaded for time and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat pleaded for money when they jointly received a United Nations peace prize in Paris.

2005 - US President George Bush celebrates his 59th birthday with the Queen of Denmark.

SOURCE: REUTERS