

Quote of the day



“Together, we must oppose all acts of unilateralism in the name of multilateralism, hegemony and power politics.”

XI JINPING TAKES A DIG AT US IN SPEECH TO POLITICAL PARTIES AROUND WORLD



“This is a crime against journalism and an attack on our values of democracy and rule of law.”

EU CHIEF CHARLES MICHEL ON THE SHOOTING OF DUTCH CRIME REPORTER PETER R DE VRIES



A woman leaves flowers where Dutch celebrity crime reporter Peter R. de Vries (inset) has been shot and reported seriously injured in Amsterdam, Netherlands, yesterday. Amsterdam police chief Frank Paauw said three people had been arrested, among them the suspected shooter, but gave no details on the possible reasons for the attack.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS
IN brief

Mamata fined for seeking recusal of HC judge

Imposing a fine of Rs five lakh on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Calcutta High Court judge Kaushik Chanda yesterday recused himself from hearing her petition challenging the election of Bharatiya Janata Party leader Suwendu Adhikari who defeated her in the assembly election in Nandigram. In June, Mamata's lawyer had sought Justice Chanda's recusal, referring to a photo in public domain which showed him attending an event with West Bengal BJP unit President Dilip Ghosh. Justice Chanda imposed the fine for the manner in which his recusal was sought and directed that the amount be deposited to the Bar Council of West Bengal within two weeks. "Such calculative, psychological and offensive attempt to seek recusal need to be firmly repulsed and a cost of Rs. five lakh is imposed upon the petitioner," he said in the order.

Drunk Indian buffaloes blow cover on contraband booze

Three Indian farmers in the dry western state of Gujarat have been arrested for selling illegal alcohol after their own buffaloes got drunk on the hooch, police said. One of the men called a local vet after their buffaloes starting to "act strangely and their mouths started frothing", local police official Dilipsinh Baldev told AFP. The vet then inspected the water trough that the animals had been drinking from and "observed a strange smell and found the water to be coloured". This, it turned out, was because the men had hidden bottles of moonshine in the trough and some of them had broken, contaminating the water. The vet then informed the police, who raided the farm on Monday and recovered 100 bottles of alcohol worth 32,000 rupees (\$400). The three farmers were arrested.

Heatwave stokes North America's warmest June

Last month was the hottest June on record in North America, stoked by a deadly heatwave searing across parts of the region, the European Union's climate monitoring service reported yesterday. Record-breaking heat scorched from the southwest to the northwest of the United States and into Canada, where the all-time record daily temperature was broken three days in a row in British Columbia. The region was 1.2 degrees Celsius (34.2 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 1991-2020 average in June, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

PRESS FREEDOM 'PREDATOR'
Pakistan fumes as RSF puts PM on list

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Pakistan has vehemently rejected an international media watchdog's report that lists PM Imran Khan on a list of the world's 37 worst rulers when it comes to press freedom.

The angry reaction from Khan's government came in response to a Monday report titled "Press freedom predators gallery - old tyrants, two women and a European", released by Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

According to the group, the "cases of brazen censorship are legion since Khan became prime minister" following parliamentary elections in 2018. It said during Khan's rule, the distribution of newspapers was interrupted, media outlets were threatened with withdrawal of advertising and TV channel signals were jammed.

"Journalists who cross the red lines have been threatened, abducted and tortured," the media watchdog said.

Pakistan's information ministry rejected the allegations. In the statement, the ministry said it was surprising that the RSF "has jumped to the conclusion" that media in Pakistan are under draconian censorship measures by Khan's government. The ministry added that it hoped the watchdog in the "future will avoid such irresponsible journalism".

War raging with Taliban

Says Afghan defence minister as insurgents attack capital of northwestern province, talks with militant group begin in Tehran

AGENCIES

The Taliban launched a major assault on a provincial capital in Afghanistan yesterday, the first since the US military began its final drawdown of troops from the country, as insurgents press on with a blistering offensive.

Fierce fighting erupted in the western city of Qala-i-Naw, the capital of Badghis, with the militants seizing police headquarters and offices of the country's spy agency.

As news of the morning assault spread, social media was flooded with videos of clashes -- with some showing armed Taliban fighters on motorbikes entering the city as onlookers cheered.

Afghanistan's Defence Minister Bismillah Mohammadi said government forces were in a "very sensitive military situation", adding that "the war is raging" with the Taliban.

The onslaught came hours after



Washington announced US forces had completed more than 90 percent of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, and as the Kabul government held talks with Taliban representatives in neighbouring Iran.

The militants have waged a dizzying campaign across Afghanistan since US and Nato forces announced the final withdrawal from the country in early May, seizing dozens of districts and stirring fears that the government is in crisis.

Hours after the attack, the defence ministry

said its troops had cleared "most parts" of the city.

"The city is not falling, but the Taliban are still in the city and airplanes are hitting their positions," she said, adding that the military had deployed drones to strike the insurgents.

The fight for the city coincided with a high-level summit across the border in Iran, where an Afghan delegation met with Taliban representatives in Tehran, according to the Iranian foreign ministry.

Opening the Tehran talks, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif welcomed the US departure from its eastern neighbour but warned: "Today the people and political leaders of Afghanistan must make difficult decisions for the future of their country."

Last week, all US and NATO forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul -- the command centre for anti-Taliban operations -- effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement that began in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Myanmar crisis may imperil wider region

Warns UN rights chief, pushes Asean to take charge

AGENCIES

The top UN human rights official yesterday called on Asean countries to launch a political dialogue with the military junta and the democratically-elected leadership in Myanmar, a day after she warned that the dire situation in there was driving the country towards possible civil war and could spark regional insecurity.

Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday, Michelle Bachelet lamented that Myanmar in recent months "has evolved from a political crisis to a multi-dimensional human rights catastrophe".

"Suffering and violence throughout the country are devastating prospects for sustainable development, and raise the possibility of state failure or a broader civil war," she said.

In addition, she cautioned, "the catastrophic developments in Myanmar since the coup... are generating clear

potential for massive insecurity, with fallout for the wider region."

Yesterday, Michelle Bachelet said the United Nations must be allowed to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in Myanmar, as agreed with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), without it being "instrumentalised" by the military.

"It is urgent for Asean to appoint a special envoy or team to get some kind of political dialogue underway. I encourage Asean to engage with the democratic leadership and civil society, not just the military front," Bachelet said.

Myanmar has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the February 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Since the coup, nearly 900 people have been killed, while about 200,000 have been forced to flee their homes, she said.

At the same time, at least 5,200 people had been arbitrarily arrested, including more than 90 journalists, according to UN numbers, while eight major media outlets had been forced to close.



THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JULY 08

1937 - Non-aggression treaty signed between Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey.

1976 - Former US president Richard Nixon was disbarred by a New York court after his obstruction of justice during the Watergate affair.

2003 - First giant panda to be returned to the wild after being raised by humans.

2007 - Former Indian Prime Minister and socialist politician Chandra Shekhar died aged 80.

2014 - Israel launches Gaza offensive in "Operation Protective Edge".

SOURCE: REUTERS



Ever Given, one of the world's largest container ships, sets sail to leave through Suez Canal after the canal authority reached a settlement with the vessel's owner and insurers, in Ismailia, Egypt, yesterday. The container ship resumed its journey to leave the Suez Canal yesterday, 106 days after becoming wedged across a southern section of the waterway for nearly a week and disrupting global trade.

PHOTO: REUTERS

World passes 4m deaths

Says WHO chief, urges extreme caution in lifting Covid restrictions

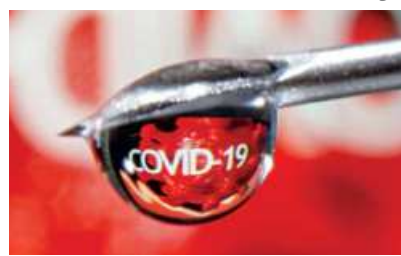
AGENCIES

The world passed the "tragic milestone" of four million recorded Covid-19 fatalities yesterday, the World Health Organization said, adding that the pandemic's true toll was probably higher.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the landmark had been reached, more than 18 months since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019.

"The world is at a perilous point in this pandemic. We have just passed the tragic milestone of four million recorded Covid-19 deaths, which likely underestimates the overall toll," Tedros told a press conference at WHO headquarters in Geneva.

The UN health agency's director-general said some countries with high vaccination coverage were now "relaxing as though the pandemic is already over", dropping public health measures and planning to roll out



booster shots.

But he said that far too many countries all over the world were seeing sharp spikes in cases and hospitalisation, due to fast-moving virus variants and a "shocking inequity" in global access to vaccines.

"This is leading to an acute shortage of oxygen, treatments and driving a wave of death in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America," Tedros said.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia expanded nationwide curbs yesterday to battle its deadliest Covid-19 wave yet, as it reported a record number

of daily deaths and the government warned the worst may be yet to come, reports AFP.

The new restrictions will apply to dozens of cities and extend from Sumatra island in the west to easternmost Papua, as the highly infectious Delta variant rips across the Southeast Asian archipelago.

In Australia, more than five million Sydney residents will spend at least another week in lockdown, authorities said yesterday, after detecting another 27 new cases.

In US, President Joe Biden on Tuesday encouraged Americans who have not yet been vaccinated against Covid-19 to get their shots to protect themselves from the widely-spreading, highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

London's Heathrow airport said yesterday it plans to offer fast-track lanes for fully vaccinated arriving passengers, as the UK government winds down its pandemic curbs.

Rockets target base hosting US troops

AFP, Baghdad

Fourteen rockets were fired yesterday at the Ain al-Assad air base which hosts American troops in western Iraq, a spokesman for the US-led coalition said.

The base was attacked by 14 rockets that "landed on the base & perimeter... At this time initial reports indicate 3 minor injuries. Damage is being assessed," Colonel Wayne Marotto wrote on Twitter.

It was the latest in a spate of attacks targeting US military and diplomatic facilities in Iraq that have been blamed on pro-Iranian armed groups within a state-sponsored paramilitary force. US forces have been targeted almost 50 times this year.

IRAN'S DECISION TO ENRICH URANIUM METAL

Stop nuke 'brinksmanship'

Warn US, Europe, say provocations endanger talks

AFP, Washington

The United States and European powers have warned Iran that its latest uranium enrichment efforts could imperil the nuclear talks in Vienna, with Washington calling on Tehran to halt its "brinksmanship."

The cross-Atlantic condemnation came hours after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran intended to enrich uranium to 20 percent, in the latest sign the talks based in Vienna -- aimed at reviving a 2015 nuclear accord -- could be stalling.

"We continue to urge Iran to stop this brinksmanship, to return to Vienna prepared for real talks, and to be in a position to be prepared to finish the work" that jump-started in April, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

Iran's move takes it a step closer to developing materials that could be used to make a nuclear weapon.

"It is worrying that Iran is choosing to continue to escalate its non-performance

of its JCPOA commitments, especially with experiments that have value for nuclear weapons research," Price said.

European powers also spoke out, with the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany expressing "grave concern" and warning that Iran's move endangers the discussions.

"With its latest steps, Iran is threatening a successful outcome to the Vienna talks despite the progress achieved in six rounds of negotiations to date," the ministers said in a statement.

Iran should return to the negotiations "without delay" and aim to bring them to a swift conclusion, they warned.

Britain, France, Germany and the United States are among the global powers, along with China and Russia, that negotiated the deal with Iran aimed at restricting its nuclear program.

Price said there was no set timeline for closing the window on negotiations with Iran.