

NEWS IN brief



Malaysian party withdraws support for embattled PM

The biggest party in Malaysia's ruling coalition, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), yesterday said it was withdrawing support for the embattled prime minister and urged him to step down. There was no immediate reaction from Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, but analysts said he was likely to hold on to power in the short term. The UMNO leader listed a string of what he said were missteps by the government, that included botched handling of the pandemic and failing to provide for those affected by on-off lockdowns. UMNO holds 38 of the 115 parliamentary seats in Muhyiddin's National Alliance coalition. A party needs 112 to command a majority.

Giuliani's law license in Washington suspended

A US appeals court on Wednesday suspended Rudy Giuliani, a former attorney for ex-President Donald Trump, from practicing law in Washington, DC. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals issued the order citing the suspension of Giuliani's New York law license two weeks ago after a court found he had lied in arguing that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from Trump. The New York Appellate Division, citing the Jan 6 riot at the US Capitol by Trump supporters, said Giuliani's eagerness to trumpet false claims threatened the public interest and could erode public confidence in the election process.

Rajapaksa family tightens grip on crisis-hit Sri Lanka

A brother of Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday became finance minister, tightening the family's grip on power in the South Asian nation as it confronts growing economic troubles. Basil Rajapaksa, 70, took over the finance portfolio from another brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The 72-year-old president has put Mahinda in charge of a newly created but lower level economic policies and planning ministry. Mahinda Rajapaksa, 75, was the country's president for a decade up to 2015, and Basil, who is known as the family's political strategist, managed the economy then. With Basil's entry, the cabinet headed by Gotabaya now has five members of the Rajapaksa family.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A woman gestures next to the house of alleged Palestinian assailant Muntasir Al-Shalabi, after it was blown up by Israeli forces, in Turmus Aya, near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. Israel yesterday drew US criticism when it destroyed the family home of a Palestinian-American accused of involvement in a shooting that killed an Israeli and wounded two others in the occupied West Bank. Israel says such demolitions deter potential Palestinian assailants. Palestinians and rights groups condemn the policy as collective punishment. PHOTO: REUTERS

ASSASSINATION OF HAITI PRESIDENT

Cops kill 4 'mercenaries'

Arrest two, say search on for the rest; UNSC condemns killing

AFP, Port-au-Prince

Haitian police killed four "mercenaries" they said were behind the assassination of President Jovenel Moise Wednesday and took two more into custody, as the impoverished and crisis-hit Caribbean nation was pitched into uncertainty.

Police did not identify the suspects or say what their motives were for the gun attack on Moise and his wife Martine, who survived, at their private residence in the capital Port-au-Prince early Wednesday.

Police chief Leon Charles said there were still more members of the hit squad at large.

"As I speak, the police are engaged in battle with these assailants," he said late Wednesday. "We are chasing them so that either in the exchange of fire they will be killed or we will apprehend them."

Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph declared a national "state of siege" and said

he was now in charge.

At the UN Security Council, members unanimously called "for the perpetrators of this abhorrent crime to be swiftly brought to justice," and for "all parties to remain calm, exercise restraint" and avoid "any act that could contribute to further instability." An emergency meeting on the crisis has been set for midday Thursday.

The airport was closed in Port-au-Prince, but witnesses said the city was quiet with the streets deserted and no extra security forces on patrol.

"Four mercenaries were killed, two were intercepted under our control. Three policemen who had been taken hostage have been recovered," said Charles, the head of Haiti's national police.

The attack took place around 1:00 am (0500 GMT) at Moise's home. Shell casings could be seen on the street outside as forensics experts combed the scene for evidence. A nearby car was peppered with

bullet holes.

Magistrate Carl Henry Destin told the Nouvelliste newspaper that the president's body had twelve bullet holes in it, from large caliber rifles and smaller 9mm weapons, to the forehead, chest, hips and abdomen.

"The president's office and bedroom were ransacked. We found him lying on his back, blue pants, a white shirt smeared with blood, his mouth open, his left eye gouged out," he said.

Moise's wife was first treated at a local hospital then rushed by air ambulance to the Ryder Trauma Center in Miami.

Joseph said she was "out of danger", later adding that "her situation is stable."

Their daughter Jomarlie was in the home during the attack but hid in a bedroom, Destin, the magistrate, said.

Haiti's ambassador to Washington, Bocchit Edmond, also said the killers were "professional" mercenaries disguised as US Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

Rockets fired at US embassy in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Three rockets were fired at the US embassy in Iraq yesterday, the Iraqi army said, at the end of a day marked by rocket and drone attacks on bases hosting American forces in Iraq and Syria.

The embassy itself was not hit, the army said, but three nearby places in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone were. A spate of recent attacks on US military and diplomatic facilities in Iraq has been blamed on pro-Iranian armed groups within a state-sponsored paramilitary force.

US forces, who have 2,500 troops deployed in Iraq as part of an international anti-Islamic State group coalition, have been targeted almost 50 times this year in the country, but the last few days have seen an increase in the frequency of attacks.

On Wednesday, fourteen rockets were fired at an air base hosting American troops in the western province of Anbar, causing minor injuries to two personnel, the coalition said.

A Shia militant group called Revenge of al-Muhandis Brigade claimed responsibility and vowed to defeat the "brutal occupation", according to the US-based SITE intelligence group, which monitors extremist groups.

The militant group is named after Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary alliance, who was killed in a US drone strike early last year along with the revered Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, SITE said.



Asylum-seeking migrants' families from Ecuador rest at riverbank as they wait to be escorted by the US Border Patrol after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico in Roma, Texas, US, on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

CENSORSHIP ROW

Trump sues tech giants

REUTERS, Washington

Former US President Donald Trump on Wednesday filed lawsuits against Twitter Inc, Facebook Inc, and Alphabet Inc's Google, as well as their chief executives, alleging they unlawfully silence conservative viewpoints.

The lawsuits, filed in US District Court in Miami, allege the California-based social media platforms violated the right to freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Trump is seeking class action status for the lawsuits, meaning he would represent the interests of other users of Twitter, Facebook, and Google's YouTube who allege they have been unfairly silenced.

He filed three lawsuits making similar allegations — one against Facebook and its CEO Mark Zuckerberg, one against Twitter and its CEO Jack Dorsey, and one against Google and its CEO Sundar Pichai.

"We will achieve a historic victory for American freedom and at the same time, freedom of speech," Trump said at a news conference at his golf course in Bedminster, New Jersey.

Trump lost his social media megaphone this year after the companies said he

violated their policies against glorifying violence. Hundreds of his supporters launched a deadly assault on the US Capitol on Jan. 6 after a Trump speech repeating his false claims that his election defeat was the result of widespread fraud, an assertion rejected by multiple courts, state election officials and members of his own administration.

The lawsuits ask a judge to invalidate Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a law that has been called the backbone of the internet because it provides websites with protections from liability over content posted by users. Trump and others who have attacked Section 230 say it has given big internet companies too much legal protection and allowed them to escape responsibility for their actions.

"This complaint is hard to even make sense of," said Paul Gowder, a professor of law at Northwestern University.

Trump sought to portray the social media companies as subject to the same First Amendment requirements as government entities when it comes to censorship, but Gowder said nothing in the lawsuits "even comes close to turning social media companies into government actors."



JULY 09

1900 - Commonwealth of Australia founded.

1932 - King Camp Gillette, US inventor and manufacturer of the safety razor, died.

1993 - British scientists using genetic fingerprinting identified the bones of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and members of his family, executed by Bolsheviks at Yekaterinburg in 1918.

2002 - The African Union was launched by at least 40 of the continent's 53 presidents and monarchs.

2011 - South Sudan formally declares independence from north.

SOURCE: REUTERS

'Victory for rule of law'

Zuma lands in jail after landmark ruling in S Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

Jacob Zuma yesterday began a 15-month sentence for contempt of court, becoming post-apartheid South Africa's first president to be jailed after a drama that campaigners said ended in a victory for rule of law.

Zuma, 79, reported to prison early yesterday after mounting a last-ditch legal bid and stoking defiance among radical supporters who had rallied at his rural home.

His battle transfixed the country, placing a spotlight on the issue of impunity and tensions within the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

South Africa's top court on June 29 slapped Zuma with a 15-month term for refusing an order to appear before a probe into the corruption that entangled his nine years in power.

As police warned he faced arrest from midnight Wednesday, Zuma handed himself in to a jail in the rural town of Estcourt in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Former corruption buster and ex-ombudswoman Thuli Madonsela hailed it as a "glorious day, in that it says that the

rule of law prevails."

The episode provided what is likely to be a crushing end to an extraordinary but tarnished career.

Born into poverty, Zuma started out as an uneducated herdboy who joined the ANC, becoming its intelligence chief in its struggle against the apartheid regime.

His charisma and courage, including 10 years in jail on notorious Robben Island, placed him alongside Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and other liberation heroes.

In 2009, he became democratic South Africa's third president, but it proved to be a tenure darkened by divisions and the stench of corruption.

In 2018, Zuma was forced out by the ANC and replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa.

Zuma has also been accused of involvement in a bribery affair dating back more than 20 years. He faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rand, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion.

Better weather warnings can save 23,000 lives: UN

AFP, Geneva

An estimated 23,000 lives a year could be saved through improving weather forecasts, early warning systems and climate information, the United Nations said yesterday.

Investment in multi-hazard early warning programmes could create potential annual benefits worth at least \$162 billion -- 10 times the cost, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said.

The first biennial Hydromet Gap Report, which looks at solutions for effective climate action and sustainable development, said only 40 percent of countries currently had effective warning systems.

SECURITY VACUUM IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER FOREIGN TROOPS' WITHDRAWAL

AFP, Herat

Plumes of smoke billowed over an Afghan provincial capital yesterday as fighting raged between the Taliban and government forces for a second straight day.

The government flew hundreds of commandos into Qala-i-Naw, in northwestern Badghis province, the first regional capital to face an all-out assault by the Taliban since the United States stepped up its troop withdrawal.

With the US pullout "90 percent complete", according to the Pentagon, the insurgents have launched a blistering campaign to capture new territory, and fears are mounting that Afghan forces will collapse without vital American air support.

In London, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said most British troops had now left Afghanistan as part of a Nato withdrawal in parallel to the US pullout.

US President Joe Biden was due to speak on the US pullout later in the day after meeting his national security team.

The withdrawals have drastically emboldened the Taliban, and video obtained by AFP showed thick smoke billowing over Qala-i-Naw yesterday,



soundtracked by gunfire, as fighting raged.

On Wednesday, the Taliban briefly seized the police headquarters and the local office of the country's spy agency, but were later pushed back.

The attack on Qala-i-Naw comes as the Taliban carry out a blistering campaign across the country but mostly in the north, capturing dozens of districts since early May.

Rights group Human Rights Watch said the insurgents were forcing

people from their houses in northern areas that they had captured.

"The Taliban's retaliatory attacks against civilians deemed to have supported the government are an ominous warning about the risk of future atrocities," said HRW associate director Patricia Gossman.

Meanwhile a meeting between Afghan government and Taliban in Tehran ended yesterday, Iran's state news agency said, with both sides urging an end to fighting, and more talks.