

NEWS
IN brief

49 killed in Niger armed attack

Five civilians, four soldiers and 40 armed attackers were killed Sunday in a clash in Niger's restive southwest region near the border with Mali, the government said. Around 100 heavily armed "terrorists" riding motorcycles attacked the Tchoma Bangou village, striking around 3 pm Sunday, Niger's Ministry of Defence said in a statement read on public television that did not identify who it suspected was behind the latest deadly incident.

India foils terror attack

An al-Qaeda offshoot in Kashmir planned attacks in northern India ahead of the country's Independence Day, police claimed after arresting two men with alleged links to the group on Sunday. The two men were detained in a district in Lucknow city, the capital of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, by an anti-terrorism squad, police said. Uttar Pradesh's Additional Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said the pair had links to Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, a Kashmir offshoot of jihadist group Al-Qaeda. He added that arms, explosives and a pressure cooker were also found. Kumar claimed the alleged plans were being coordinated from Pakistan.

Gem thieves rob star at Cannes

Hollywood star Jodie Turner-Smith has fallen victim to the curse of Cannes -- the jewellery thieves who regularly haunt the world's biggest film festival. The British-born actress wore eye-catching Gucci gold and diamond jewellery to the red carpet premiere of her latest film "After Yang" on Thursday. The next morning her suite at the Marriott hotel in the Riviera resort was broken into while she was having breakfast with her one-year-old daughter. Cannes have become a notorious hunting ground for international cat burglars with a member of the infamous Pink Panthers gang suspected of taking gems worth 103 million euros (\$130 million) from the Carlton hotel in 2013.



S Africa deploys army after riots

South Africa will deploy soldiers to quell violence that erupted in the wake of former president Jacob Zuma's jailing, the military said yesterday, after days of riots and looting left at least six people dead. Disturbances worsened as Zuma challenged his 15-month prison term in the country's top court after weekend unrest by pro-Zuma protesters in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng. Police said 219 arrests had been made. Zuma, 79, was sentenced late last month for defying a constitutional court order to give evidence at an inquiry investigating high-level corruption during his nine years in office until 2018.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



People clash with plain clothes police during protests against the government, amidst the coronavirus disease outbreak, in Havana, Cuba on Sunday. Inset, Police cars are seen overturned in a street. Chanting "freedom" and calling for the President Miguel Diaz-Canel to step down, thousands of Cubans joined street protests from Havana to Santiago on Sunday in the biggest anti-government demonstrations on the Communist-run island in decades.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Quotes of the day



“We see China using economic and financial means to increase its political influence everywhere in the world...we must offer alternatives.”

GERMAN FM HEIKO MAAS ON LAUNCHING EU'S GLOBAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN



“Urgent policy action is required to transform economic, social and financial models so that the trends that have exacerbated biodiversity loss will stabilise by 2030.”

ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA, UN'S BIODIVERSITY CHIEF, AS SHE UNVEILS BIODIVERSITY GOALS

One in 3 going hungry

Warns UN, says Covid triggered biggest increase in hunger in decades

AFP, Paris

The Covid pandemic caused an estimated 18 percent increase in the number of people facing hunger, a UN report released yesterday, dealing a massive setback to efforts to ensure everyone has access to food.

The world was already off track to achieve its goal of eradicating hunger by 2030, but the report warned that Covid had now sent it back in the wrong direction.

The "economic downturns as a consequence of Covid-19 containment measures all over the world have contributed to one of the largest increases in world hunger in decades," said the annual food security and nutrition report compiled by several UN agencies.

Although the full impact of the pandemic cannot yet be determined, the report estimated around 118 million more people faced hunger in



2020 than in 2019, an increase of 18 percent.

The rise in moderate or severe food insecurity was equal to the previous five years combined.

"Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2020 -- an increase of almost 320 million people in just one year," the report said.

One in 10 people were undernourished. The increase in hunger was widespread as the economic downturn affected almost all low- and middle-income countries. But the biggest impact was in

countries where there were also climate-related disasters or conflict, or both.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is just the tip of the iceberg," said the report.

"More alarmingly, the pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities forming in our food systems over recent years as a result of major drivers such as conflict, climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns and downturns."

The UN agencies said there is a unique opportunity to reverse the dynamic this year however, thanks to two major food and nutrition summits plus the COP26 meeting on climate change.

The report was jointly published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

URBAN GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

25 cities contribute more than 50pc

REUTERS, London/Madrid

Just 25 big cities -- almost all of them in China -- accounted for more than half of the climate-warming gases pumped out by a sample of 167 urban hubs around the world, an analysis of emissions trends showed.

In per capita terms, however, emissions from cities in the richest parts of the world are still generally higher than those from urban centres in developing countries, researchers found in the study published in the Frontiers journal yesterday.

The study compared greenhouse gas emissions reported by 167 cities in 53 countries, and found that 23 Chinese cities -- among them Shanghai, Beijing and Handan -- along with Moscow and Tokyo accounted for 52% of the total.

It included more cities from China, India, the United States and the European Union because of their larger contribution to global emissions and significance to the climate debate.

Average global temperatures have already risen by more than 1 degree Celsius compared to the pre-industrial baseline and are still on track to exceed the 1.5-2 degree limit set by the Paris Agreement.

Sixty-eight of the cities -- mostly in developed nations -- had set absolute emissions reduction targets. But only 30 of the 42 cities where progress was tracked in the study had shown a reduction. Most of them were in the United States and Europe.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JULY 13

1930 - The first soccer World Cup began in Montevideo, Uruguay, with 13 teams taking part.

1943 - The greatest tank battle in history, at Kursk, south of Moscow, ended with the Soviet Red Army defeating the German invaders. Almost 6,000 tanks took part, and at least 230,000 men were killed or wounded or went missing.

2016 - British Prime Minister David Cameron resigns after Brexit referendum.

SOURCE: REUTERS



The temperature gauge at the Furnace Creek Visitors Center in Death Valley displays 125 degrees after 7pm, in California, on Sunday. Millions of people across the western United States and Canada were hit by a new round of scorching hot temperatures, with some roads closed, train traffic limited and new evacuations ordered.

PHOTO: AFP

Suu Kyi hit by four new charges in Mandalay court

REUTERS

Myanmar's deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi is facing four additional criminal charges, filed in a court in the country's second biggest city Mandalay, her lawyer said yesterday.

The legal team has little information about what Suu Kyi was accused of but the charges included corruption and that two were also leveled at Min Thu, a former minister in her government, lawyer Min Min Soe told Reuters.

"There are corruption charges. We do not know why do they sue? Or for what reasons? We will find out about it," she said.

The new cases could see Suu Kyi, 76, tied up in legal proceedings in three different cities.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner has been held since a Feb. 1 coup and is on trial in the capital Naypyitaw over charges that include illegal importation and possession



of walkie-talkie radios and violating coronavirus protocols under a disaster management law.

She is charged also in a Yangon court, accused of unspecified breaches of the Official Secrets Act, punishable by a maximum of 14 years in jail.

Her legal team rejects all of the charges. Chief lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said cross-examination of a prosecution witness yesterday revealed a raid on Suu Kyi's home had been carried out illegally without a warrant.

At a news conference yesterday, military spokesman Zaw Min Tun made no mention of any new charges. Answering a question about Suu Kyi, he said she had breached the constitution when the post of state councilor was created, which he said came between the president and vice presidents in the command structure.

It was not clear if that allegation was among the new charges.

Lightning strikes kill dozens in India

AFP, New Delhi

More than 50 people were killed in lightning strikes across several states in India, authorities said Monday, including 11 people at a historic fort.

Hundreds of people are killed each year in intense storms at the start of the monsoon season, which bring respite from the summer heat across the northern Indian plains.

At least 42 people died Sunday in different districts of Uttar Pradesh, according to disaster-response authorities in India's most populous state.

In Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, bolts hit two watchtowers at the 12th-century Amer Fort, which were packed with visitors watching the storm cross the city.

"It was already raining when the people were there. They huddled in the towers as the rainfall intensified," Saurabh Tiwari, a senior Jaipur police officer, told AFP.

People had flocked to the fort, which gives a panoramic view across Jaipur, after several weeks of intense heat in the state.

Eleven people were killed and another 17 were injured, with three in critical condition, according to police. Tiwari said up to 30 people were on the towers when the lightning struck.

Media reports said about 10 other people were killed by lightning strikes across Rajasthan.

Space tourism begins

AFP, United States

British billionaire Richard Branson flew into space Sunday aboard a Virgin Galactic vessel, a voyage he described as the "experience of a lifetime" -- and one he hopes will usher in an era of lucrative space tourism.

The mission's success allowed the swashbuckling septuagenarian to one-up fellow tycoon Jeff Bezos -- who owns space company Blue Origin and is set to launch on July 20 -- in the race to the final frontier.

"I have dreamt of this moment since I was a kid, but honestly nothing could prepare you for the view of Earth from space," Branson said, grinning during a post-flight ceremony where he and crewmates received their astronaut wings, before popping open the champagne to celebrate.

Branson, three fellow passengers and two pilots (all Virgin employees) breached the US-recognized boundary of space, reaching an altitude of 86 kilometers and experiencing weightlessness for a few minutes aboard the VSS Unity.

The spaceplane then lowered its wings and glided down to the ground at around 9:40 am Mountain Time (1540 GMT), about an hour after it had taken off attached to the belly of a massive carrier plane, which ascended 15 kilometers before dropping its payload.

The rocket-powered Unity achieved a



top speed of Mach 3 as it soared to space.

After Sunday, Virgin Galactic plans two further flights, and then the start of regular commercial operations from early 2022. The ultimate goal is to conduct 400 flights per year.

Some 600 tickets have already been sold to people from 60 different countries -- including Hollywood celebrities -- for prices ranging from \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Branson's says his voyage will help him to increase the private astronaut experience for future clients.

The competition in the space tourism sector has come to a head this month. Bezos, the richest person in the world, is due to fly nine days from now on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket.

Several tourists journeyed to the International Space Station in the 2000s, but on Russian rockets. However, with the competition among Virgin Galactic, Origin and Elon Musk's Space X, the prospect of regular space tourism is becoming a reality.

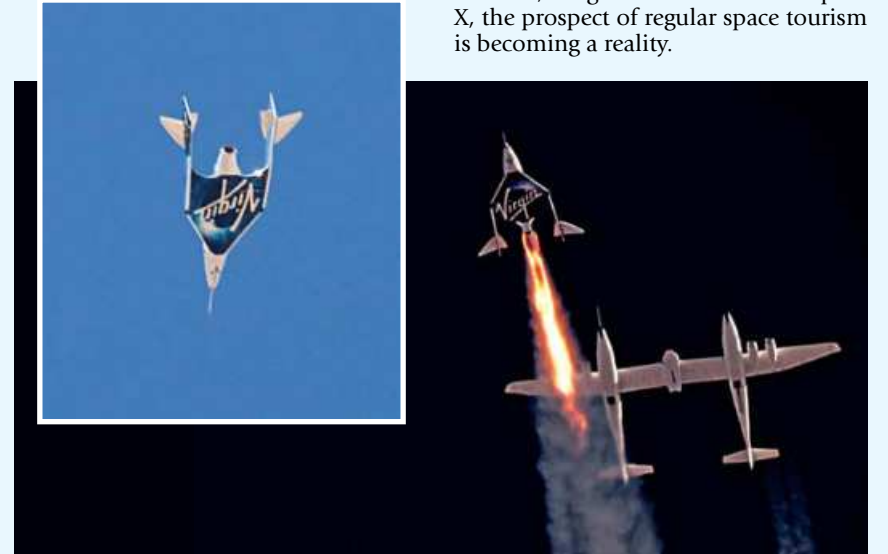


PHOTO: REUTERS

Virgin Galactic's passenger rocket plane VSS Unity, carrying Richard Branson and crew, begins its ascent to the edge of space, after blasting off from New Mexico, US; VSS Unit descends after reaching the edge of space; and Branson and crew members float in zero gravity after reaching the edge of space.