



People rally in solidarity with protesters in Cuba, in Little Havana neighborhood in Miami, Florida, US, on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UNPRECEDENTED ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

Cuba blames US

Washington says protest result of 'decades of repression'

AFP, Havana

Havana on Monday blamed a US "policy of economic suffocation" for unprecedented protests against Cuba's communist government, as Washington pointed the finger at "decades of repression" in the one-party state.

The longtime foes traded barbs a day after thousands of Cubans took to the streets chanting: "Down with the dictatorship" in protests dispersed by police who arrested dozens.

The anti-government rallies erupted spontaneously in several cities as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity, food and medicine and a recent worsening of the coronavirus epidemic.

The only authorized gatherings in Cuba are usually events of the ruling Communist Party, but according to the data journalism site Inventario, a total of 40 demonstrations took place on Sunday.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel blamed the discontent on the United States pursuing a "policy of economic suffocation to provoke social unrest in the country."

Cuba has been under US sanctions since 1962.

"What do they want? To provoke social unrest" with a view to "regime change," he said in an address broadcast on public television and radio.

He called on "all communists to go out in the streets where these provocations occur... and to face them in a decisive, firm and courageous way."

In a statement from Washington, US President Joe Biden expressed support

for the protesters' demand for relief "from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it would be a "grievous mistake" for Cuba to blame Washington for protests he said could be traced to the communist leadership's "mismanagement" of the economy and Covid-19.

US-Cuba relations have been particularly fraught since then-president Donald Trump reinforced sanctions following an historic but temporary easing of tensions under Barack Obama between 2014 and 2016.

The tougher measures, left unchanged by Biden, and the collapse of tourism due to the global pandemic, contributed to Cuba's economy declining 11 percent in 2020.

The EU and UN on Monday called for Cuba to respect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, himself under fire at home for his handling of the pandemic, expressed "solidarity" with protesters seeking "an end to a cruel dictatorship."

But Mexico and long-term Cuban ally Russia warned against using the unrest as a pretext for foreign interference.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro expressed "all support" for the Cuban government during a televised meeting. His Argentine counterpart Alberto Fernandez demanded the US sanctions be lifted, although he rejected a possible intervention.

Covid 3rd wave inevitable

Says India's top medical body; Modi warns against super-spreader gatherings

AGENCIES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned yesterday against overcrowding at tourist sites after the Indian Medical Association (IMA) warned that the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is "inevitable" and "imminent" and alerted the state governments against allowing potential "super-spreader" events.

"With the global evidence available and the history of any pandemic, the third wave is inevitable and imminent," the medical association said in a press release.

The top doctors' body raised its specific concern over tourism activities, pilgrimages and other forms of mass congregations that have been permitted in several states amid the declining coronavirus second wave.

"I will say very emphatically that it is not OK to have huge crowds in hill stations, markets, without wearing masks," Modi said in comments posted on Twitter while acknowledging the tourism industry has been badly hit by lockdowns.

India's coronavirus caseload of

30.91 million infections is the world's second-highest behind the United States.

Its official tally of deaths is 410,784, many of them coming in a brutal second wave of infections in April and May when people died outside



hospitals as they waited for beds and bodies were washing up on the banks of the holy Ganges river.

Yesterday, authorities reported 32,906 new cases - the lowest daily tally since mid-March - compared with some 400,000 a day at the height of the second wave.

The government last month launched a campaign to inoculate all adults, with a target of 950 million people by the end of the year, but the pace of the drive has faltered because

of shortages of vaccines and various logistical hurdles, and only 8% of the target is fully vaccinated.

The Delta variant that is spreading in many countries was first detected in India where experts have recently identified what they believe is a new variant they have called Delta plus.

"To combat the third wave, we have to keep speeding up the process of vaccination," Modi said.

While new daily cases are at a three-month low, deaths have not fallen at the same pace. India reported 2,020 new Covid-19 deaths yesterday.

SPUTNIK COVID-19 VACCINE DEAL

Meanwhile, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Serum Institute of India (SII) yesterday unveiled plans to start producing Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine in India from September to help meet New Delhi's own needs in the first instance.

RDIF, Russia's sovereign wealth fund, which promotes the vaccine globally, said the plan was to produce over 300 million doses of the vaccine per year in India, the leading production hub for Sputnik V.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



JULY 14

1789 – Storming of the Bastille in Paris. This event escalates the widespread discontent into the French Revolution.

1933 – The Nazi Party under Adolf Hitler bans all opposition parties in Germany.

1957 – Rawya Ateya takes her seat in the National Assembly of Egypt, thereby becoming the first female parliamentarian in the Arab world.

2015 – NASA's New Horizons probe performs the first flyby of Pluto, and thus completes the initial survey of the Solar System.

SOURCE: REUTERS



Deadly unrest in South Africa

A South African cop fires rubber bullets at rioters looting the Jabulani Mall in Soweto, southwest of Johannesburg, on Monday. Stores in two South African provinces were ransacked yesterday for a fifth consecutive day, hours after President Ramaphosa deployed troops in a bid to quell unrest that has claimed 45 lives. At least 757 people have been arrested. The unrest erupted last Friday after former president Jacob Zuma started serving a 15-month term for snubbing a probe into the corruption that stained his nine years in power.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

France fines Google 500m euros over copyright row

France's antitrust watchdog yesterday slapped a 500 million euro (\$593 million) fine on Alphabet's Google for failing to comply fully with temporary orders it had given in a row with the country's news publishers. The US tech giant must within the next two months come up with proposals on how it would compensate news agencies and other publishers for the use of their news. If it does not do that, it would face additional fines of up to 900,000 euros per day. News publishers APIG, SEPM and AFP accuse the tech giant of having failed to open talks in good faith with them to find common ground for the remuneration of news content online, under a recent EU directive that creates so-called "neighboring rights".

Wildfires rage across million acres in US, Canada

Wildfires were burning across more than one million acres of the western United States and Canada on Monday, as scorching temperatures held their grip on areas reeling from a brutal weekend heat wave. Some 850,000 acres were on fire in the United States – mainly in western states such as Oregon, California and Arizona – while more than 300,000 acres smoldered in Canada's British Columbia alone, according to wildfire officials. After a brief lull from late June's previous heat wave, extreme temperatures in recent days reached as far inland as the edge of the Rocky Mountains – part of a dramatic trend that experts attribute directly to climate change.

Macron's warning sees surge in French job requests

A record number of French people sought to book appointments for Covid-19 vaccinations on Monday night after President Emmanuel Macron announced a slew of measures designed to push sceptics to get themselves jabbed. In an address to the nation, Macron announced that from next month anyone wanting to go out to eat or drink, take a long-distance train or visit a shopping centre or a theatre show or a cinema screening will need to show either proof of vaccination or a negative test. The prospect of having to take a test for every meal or drink out appeared to have an instant impact on many unvaccinated people, with the main websites used to book appointments for a jab reporting a surge in visits. The Doctolib site reported what it said was a record 20,000 appointments being taken every minute on Monday evening.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Prevent your cities from getting damaged

Taliban tell city dwellers, warn Turkey over airport security deal

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban do not want to battle government forces inside Afghanistan's cities and would rather see them surrender, a senior insurgent leader said Tuesday, as the militants also warned Turkey against extending its troop presence.

The hardline Islamist group has swept through much of the north as foreign troops complete their withdrawal, and the government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be supplied by air.

On Tuesday, the head of a Taliban commission that oversees government forces who surrender urged residents of Afghanistan's cities to reach out to them.

"Now that the fighting from mountains and deserts has reached the doors of the cities, Mujahidin (Taliban) don't want fighting inside the city," Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a message tweeted by a Taliban spokesman.

"It is better... to use any possible channel to get in touch with our invitation and guidance commission," he said, adding this would "prevent their cities from getting damaged."

The strategy is one well-worn by the Taliban – particularly during their first rise to power in the 1990s – cutting off towns and district centres and getting elders to negotiate a surrender.

Hours after Muttaqi's message, a rush hour blast in the centre of the Afghan capital killed four civilians and wounded five others, police said.

In a separate statement yesterday, the Taliban said Turkey's decision to provide security to Kabul airport when US-led forces leave was "reprehensible". "We consider stay of foreign forces in our homeland by any country under whatever pretext as occupation," the group said, days after Ankara agreed with Washington to provide security for Kabul airport.

REUTERS, Nassiriya

The death toll from a fire that tore through a coronavirus hospital in southern Iraq rose to 92, health officials said yesterday, as authorities faced accusations of negligence from grieving relatives and a doctor who works there.

More than 100 others were injured in Monday night's fire in Nassiriya, which an investigation showed began when sparks from faulty wiring spread to an oxygen tank that then exploded, police and civil defence authorities said - the second such tragedy in three months.

Rescue teams were using a heavy crane yesterday to remove the charred and melted remains of the part of the city's al-Hussain hospital where Covid-19 patients were being treated, as relatives gathered nearby.

A medic at the hospital, who declined to give his name and whose Monday shift ended a few hours before the fire broke out, said the absence of basic safety measures meant it was an accident in the making.

"The hospital lacks a fire sprinkler system or even a simple fire alarm," he told Reuters.

FIRE AT IRAQ COVID-19 WARD

Anger as death toll hits 92

"We complained many times over the past three months that a tragedy could happen any moment from a cigarette stub but every time we get the same answer from health officials: 'we don't have enough money.'

In April, a similar explosion at Baghdad Covid-19 hospital killed at least 82 and injured 110. The head of Iraq's semi-official Human



Rights Commission said Monday's blast showed how ineffective safety measures still were in a health system crippled by war and sanctions.

An investigation team has arrived from Baghdad yesterday to find out what happened at the hospital, sources said.

Health and civil defence managers in the city and the hospital's manager

had been suspended and arrested on Monday on the orders of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, his office said.

At the city's morgue, anger spread among people gathered as they waited to receive their relatives' bodies.

"No quick response to the fire, not enough firefighters. Sick people burned to death. It's a disaster," said Mohammed Fadhl, who was waiting there to receive his brother's body.

Two health officials said the dead from Monday's fire included 21 charred bodies that were still unidentified.

The blaze trapped many patients inside the coronavirus ward who rescue teams struggled to reach, a health worker told Reuters on Monday before entering the burning building.

In Najaf, a holy Shia city around 250 km (155 miles) northwest of Nassiriya, an angry Imad Hashim sobbed as he prepared to bury his mother, sister-in-law and niece, who all died in the fire.

"What should I say after losing my family," the 46-year-old said. "No point from demanding anything from a failed government. Three days and this case will be forgotten like others."

Commuters escape Mexico City gridlock in new cable car

AFP, Mexico City

Commuters soared over one of the world's biggest and most traffic-clogged cities as a new cable car system went into operation in the Mexican capital on Monday.

The 9.2-kilometer aerial tramway, comprising 377 cars that can each carry 10 passengers, promises to cut travel times for thousands of people in northern Mexico City, a sprawling city of 20 million people.

"How much time was wasted. They should have done this much earlier," said 46-year-old electrician Marco Antonio Garcia, delighted that what was a journey of more than an hour now takes 20 minutes.

"Are we in France or Switzerland?" he said, laughing along with the other passengers.

In contrast to the buses and metro where pickpockets and thieves operate, passengers aboard the new Cablebus system enjoyed comfortable seats, legroom, air conditioning and Wi-Fi.

The line between Cuitláhuac and Indios Verdes can carry up to 5,000 people an hour between six stations, according to Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum's office, which



plans to open a second line in the east of the city.

Similar systems also exist in a number of other Latin American cities, notably La Paz and adjoining El Alto in Bolivia which have a 32-kilometer aerial tramway.

SCHOOLS CLOSURE DUE TO COVID

19 nations risk 'generational catastrophe': UN

AFP, Paris

Schools remain shut in 19 countries due to the pandemic, affecting 156 million children in what risks being "a generational catastrophe," the heads of two UN agencies warned Monday.

The statement from the leaders of UNICEF and UNESCO said "governments have too often shut down schools and kept them closed for prolonged periods, even when the epidemiological situation didn't warrant it."

"We urge decision-makers and governments to prioritise the safe reopening of schools to avoid a generational catastrophe," UNICEF leader Henrietta Fore and UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay wrote.

"Closing schools mortgages our future for unclear benefits to our present. We must prioritise better. We can re-open schools safely, and we must," they added.

Quote of the day



"We will look back in anger, and we will look back in shame."

MIKE RYAN, WHO'S EMERGENCIES PROGRAMME HEAD, SLAMS WEALTHY COUNTRIES WHICH ARE PLANNING BOOSTER SHOTS FOR THEIR VACCINATED PEOPLE WHILE THOUSANDS UNVACCINATED PEOPLE DYING IN POORER COUNTRIES