

COVID ORIGIN PROBE WHO eyes China lab audits

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization said on Friday that the second stage of an investigation into the origins of Covid-19 should include further studies in China and lab audits.

In a closed-door briefing to member states, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus proposed five priorities for the next phase of the investigation.

They included "audits of relevant laboratories and research institutions operating in the area of the initial human cases identified in December 2019", according to a copy of his opening statement. He also suggested investigators should focus on "studies prioritising geographic areas with the earliest indication of circulation of SARS CoV-2", the virus that causes Covid-19.

WHO has been under intensifying pressure from the West for a new, more in-depth investigation of how the disease that has killed over four million people around the world first emerged.



Members of the Bundeswehr forces, surrounded by partially submerged cars, wade through the flood water following heavy rainfalls in Ertstadt-Blessem, Germany, yesterday. Rescue workers searched flood-ravaged parts of Germany and Belgium for survivors yesterday after burst rivers and flash floods this week collapsed houses and claimed at least 157 lives.

PHOTO: REUTERS

COVID MISINFORMATION

Social media 'killing people'

Says Biden as US warns Covid 'becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated'

AGENCIES

US President Joe Biden on Friday said social media platforms like Facebook "are killing people" for allowing misinformation about coronavirus vaccines to be posted on its platform, as the administration continued criticizing the company.

"They're killing people. ... Look, the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated. And they're killing people," Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about misinformation and what his message was to social media platforms such as Facebook Inc's.

Covid-19 misinformation has proliferated during the pandemic on social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and Alphabet Inc-owned YouTube. Researchers and lawmakers have long accused Facebook of failing to police harmful content on its platforms.

The company has introduced rules against making specific false claims



about Covid-19 and vaccines for it, and says it provides people reliable information on these topics.

"We will not be distracted by accusations which aren't supported by the facts," Facebook spokesman Kevin McAlister said on Friday.

Twitter and YouTube did not respond to requests for comment.

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is now the dominant strain worldwide, accompanied by a surge of deaths around the United States almost entirely among unvaccinated people,

US officials said on Friday.

American cases of Covid-19 are up 70% over the previous week and deaths are up 26%, with outbreaks occurring in parts of the country with low vaccination rates. US reported more than 33,000 new cases on Thursday.

Earlier, US health authorities pleaded with Covid vaccine holdouts to roll up their sleeves and get their shots, as cases, hospitalizations and deaths surged.

"There is a clear message that is coming through: this is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky told reporters.

A recent study in the journal Virological shows Delta grows more rapidly inside the body compared to past strains, and people who are infected shed much more of it in the air, greatly increasing the likelihood it will be transmitted.

CHAOS IN AFGHANISTAN

Rivals meet in Doha Pakistan denies air support to Taliban

AFP, Doha

Representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban met in Doha for talks yesterday, AFP correspondents said, as violence rages in the country with foreign forces almost entirely withdrawn.

The two sides have been meeting on and off for months in the Qatari capital, but the talks have lost momentum as the insurgents have made battlefield gains.

Several high-ranking officials, including former Afghan former chief executive Abdullah Abdullah, gathered in a luxury hotel after morning prayers. They were joined by negotiators from the Taliban's political office in Doha.

The Taliban have capitalised on the last stages of the withdrawal of US and other foreign troops from Afghanistan to launch a series of lightning offensives across the country.

Meanwhile, Pakistan yesterday partially reopened its side of the southern border crossing with Afghanistan, shut after the Taliban seized control of the strategic Afghan frontier town of Spin Boldak from government forces last week.

As fighting raged over large swathes of Afghanistan, a war of words was also heating up between Kabul and Islamabad, after the Afghan vice president accused the Pakistani military of providing "close air support to Taliban in certain areas".

Pakistan strongly denied the claim.

Pakistan's Balochistan province has been home to the Taliban's top leadership for decades, along with a large contingent of reserve fighters who regularly enter Afghanistan to bolster their ranks.

NEWS IN brief

'Dreamers' program illegal, US court rules

A US federal judge on Friday dealt a fresh blow to an immigration program protecting undocumented migrants brought to the country as children, ruling it unlawful and blocking the enrollment of new applicants. Instituted by former president Barack Obama in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) covers around 700,000 people known as Dreamers. For many, America is the only country they have ever known. The government must stop accepting people to the program, he judge said, though he added it could still receive applications. The ruling also did not immediately affect the status of people already accepted to the program.

Indian Kashmir bans animal slaughter during Eid-ul-Azha

The Indian government has ordered authorities in Kashmir to ban the slaughter of all animals in the Muslim majority region for the Islamic festival of Eid-ul-Azha. The order by the Hindu nationalist government, released late Thursday, is likely to heighten tensions in Indian Kashmir where anxiety has deepened since New Delhi revoked its special autonomous status in August 2019. Citing animal welfare laws, the government's Animal Welfare Board of India ordered police and authorities to "take all preventive measures" to halt the "illegal killing of animals and to take stringent action against offenders." Cows are considered sacred by many Hindus and their slaughter is banned in the region and many Indian states. The new order extends the ban to all animals for the first time.



Thailand plans more curbs as Covid deaths hit record

Thailand is looking to introduce more restrictions on movement as authorities yesterday reported record numbers of new cases and deaths, despite partial lockdowns in Bangkok and nine other provinces this week. The country's Covid-19 task force reported 10,082 new coronavirus cases and 141 additional deaths, both daily records and bringing total infections to 391,989 cases and fatalities to 3,240 since the pandemic started. Thailand has already imposed a nationwide ban on public gatherings which carries a maximum penalty of a two-year jail term or a fine of up to 40,000 baht (\$1,220), or both, an announcement on the official Royal Gazette published late on Friday showed.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Serious connectivity can't be 'one-way street'

Indian FM tells regional summit in Tashkent
on China's Belt and Road Initiative

NDTV ONLINE

Building connectivity is an act of trust and it must, at the minimum, conform to existing laws as respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity are the most basic principles of international relations, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said at a regional conference in Tashkent on Friday.

He also said that connectivity efforts must be based on economic viability and financial responsibility and they should not create debt burdens, seen as an oblique reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

He said no serious connectivity initiative can ever be 'a one-way street' and that the real issues are of "mindsets, not of disputes" as blocking connectivity in practice while professing support in principle benefits no one.

There has been growing global criticism of the BRI as Chinese financing has resulted in rising debt in several countries where infrastructure projects under the mega initiative are being implemented.

In his address, S Jaishankar said there was a need to address not just physical infrastructure but all its accompanying facets while expanding connectivity between Central Asia and South Asia.

The conference on "Central and South

Asia: Connectivity" has been hosted by Uzbekistan with an aim to significantly boost connectivity between the two regions. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and leaders from around 35 countries attended the conference.

Jaishankar also said that for reliable connectivity within and through Afghanistan, the world must have confidence in its governance, noting that development and prosperity go hand in hand with peace and security.

He also referred to practical steps taken by India since 2016 to operationalize the Chabahar port in Iran.

"This provides a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for Central Asian countries. We have proposed to include the Chabahar port in the framework of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)," he said.

The INSTC is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

"We are gathered here today in pursuit of a more prosperous and inter-connected Eurasia. To realise that, India stands ready to cooperate, plan, invest and build," Jaishankar said.



Damaged vehicles sit outside a home destroyed by the Chuweah Creek Fire as wildfires devastate Nespalem in eastern Washington state, on Friday. The extreme drought-hit western United States braced for more wildfire destruction Friday as efforts to contain a vast blaze scorching southern Oregon failed to progress, and dangerous dry lightning storms were forecast in California.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Lost Honduran toddler reunited with mother

REUTERS, Tegucigalpa

A toddler who made international headlines when he was found alone in Mexico after a harrowing attempt to reach the United States was reunited with his family in Honduras on Friday, his mother said.

The boy's mother, Lorena Garcia, 23, said she hugged her two-year-old son Wilder tightly when she met him in the northern Honduran city of San Pedro Sula where he arrived by plane after spending nearly 20 days in the custody of Mexican authorities.

Wilder's plight received international media attention after he was found alone in June near a cargo truck that carried dozens of migrants making their way through Veracruz state to the US border with Mexico. Mexican security agents found Wilder half naked and surrounded by trash.

"I am happy to see Wilder again," Garcia told Reuters by phone after traveling six hours from her village to meet her son. "I am not putting him at risk anymore."

Garcia had said Wilder and his father had left the family's home in Copan near the border with Guatemala in a bid to reach the US and secure work. The father and son were traveling with a human smuggler, Garcia said. Wilder's father is being held at an immigration center, she added.

Request for proposal (RFP) for hiring sub-awardees under the "USAID's Alliance for Combating TB in Bangladesh Activity" of icddr,b

Tender Ref. icddr/b/G&F/OTM/2021/004

Date: 18 July 2021

icddr,b leads the four-year TB implementation project titled "USAID's Alliance for Combating TB in Bangladesh Activity". icddr,b is now inviting sealed proposals from any interested private non-profit organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), community based organisations (CBOs), who fulfil the criteria mentioned in the RFP for selection of sub-recipients. The RFP document contains all the necessary information for interested offerors. With most proficient offeror, icddr,b will sign an agreement for currently established scope.

Interested participants can download the RFP documents from the web address below: <http://www.icddr.org/work-with-us/tender-notices>

Pre-bid meeting will be held on 26 July 2021 at 2.30 PM BST on Microsoft Teams. Please see the bid documents for details of location and contact.

Offerors shall submit their offers through hard copy in designated place as mentioned in the RFP document. Offers must be received no later than 8 August 2021 at 2:30 PM BST. Please note that bid opening session will not be conducted as a public opening.

icddr,b reserves the right to accept or reject all/part proposals without assigning any reason whatsoever. This RFP invitation will also form a part of the contract and will be binding upon the tenderer.

Senior Manager, Grants & Compliance

AGAINST ALL ODDS

UNIVERSITY OF LIBERAL ARTS
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VIRTUAL CONVOCATION 2021*

REGISTRATION OPEN

E-registration: convocation.ulab.edu.bd

Deadline: 7 August 2021

Eligibility: Spring 2021 or earlier graduates

Contacts: 01611470612, controller@ulab.edu.bd

*To be held in September, subject to the schedule of the Honourable Chancellor.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JULY 18

1877 - Inventor Thomas Edison records the human voice for the first time.

1936 - The Spanish Civil War began with a revolt at Melilla in what was then Spanish Morocco.

1994 - A bomb at a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires killed 96 people.

1925 - Volume One of Adolf Hitler's philosophical autobiography, Mein Kampf, is published.

SOURCE: REUTERS