

Quote of the day



“... I hope this small step will wake up others. We want it to start as soon as possible. Many people from Bengal have been tapped.”

WEST BENGAL CM **MAMATA BANERJEE** ON SETTING UP A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY - CONSISTING OF RETIRED CALCUTTA HIGH COURT CHIEF JUSTICE JYOTIRMAY BHATTACHARYA AND RETIRED SUPREME COURT JUSTICE MB LOKUR - TO PROBE THE PEGASUS PHONE-HACKING SCANDAL.



TUNISIAN DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS Supporters of Tunisia's biggest political party, the moderate Islamist Ennahda, take cover from stones thrown at them by supporters of President Kais Saied, outside the parliament building in Tunis, Tunisia yesterday. Tunisia faced its worst crisis in a decade of democracy yesterday after President Saied ousted the government and froze parliament with help from the army in a move denounced as a coup by the main parties including Islamists. Saied's dramatic move -- a decade on from Tunisia's 2011 revolution, often held up as the Arab Spring's sole success story -- comes even though the constitution enshrines a parliamentary democracy and largely limits presidential powers to security and diplomacy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SE Asia cases hit new highs

Malaysian doctors stage walkout amid worsening outbreak

AGENCIES

Thailand reported a record number of coronavirus cases yesterday, while Malaysia has notched up more than 1 million infections, as the virulent Delta variant carves a deadly path through Southeast Asia - now a global epicentre for the virus.

Thailand had 15,376 new coronavirus cases, a daily record for a second consecutive day in the nation of more than 66 million.

Malaysia, which has one of Southeast Asia's highest per capita infection rates, reported on Sunday 17,045 new cases, bringing the total to 1,013,438 and nearly 8,000 deaths, despite a being under lockdown since June.

Like many parts of the region of more than 650 million people, Malaysian hospitals and medical staff have borne the brunt of the outbreak amid shortages of beds, ventilators and oxygen.

Thousands of Malaysian contract

doctors yesterday staged a walkout over the terms of their employment, though they pledged patients would not be affected by the protest.

The doctors, who want permanent postings, as well as better pay and benefits, said an offer by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to extend their contracts did not go far enough.

COVID PANDEMIC

Malaysia's vaccine rollout, however, has outpaced that of many neighbours, with about 16.9% of its 32 million people fully inoculated.

Thailand's government last week imposed tighter lockdown measures in the capital, Bangkok, and 12 high-risk provinces, suspending most domestic flights and expanding curfew area.

The Thai central bank has said the wave of infections is expected to reduce gross domestic product in the

tourism-dependent country by up to 2% this year.

Indonesia, the region's most populous country, with more than 270 million people, has Southeast Asia's biggest caseload. It has reported more than 3.1 million infections and 83,000 deaths.

Still, amid economic pressures, the government on Sunday announced that although coronavirus curbs would be extended by a week, some measures would be relaxed, including allowing traditional markets and restaurants with outdoor areas to reopen.

"The decision doesn't seem to be related to the pandemic, but to economics," said Pandu Riono, an epidemiologist at the University of Indonesia, urging people to maintain health protocols.

Indonesia last week reported record-high deaths on four separate days, the last of which was 1,566 fatalities on Friday.

TALIBAN OFFENSIVES IN AFGHANISTAN

Civilian casualty figures at record high: UN

AGENCIES

The United Nations warned yesterday that Afghanistan could see the highest number of civilian deaths in more than a decade if the Taliban's offensives across the country are not halted.

Violence has surged since early May when the insurgents cranked up operations to coincide with a final withdrawal of US-led foreign forces.

In a report released yesterday documenting civilian casualties for the first half of 2021, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said it expected figures to touch their highest single-year levels since the mission began reporting over a decade ago.

It also warned that Afghan troops and pro-government forces were responsible for a quarter of all civilian casualties. "Unprecedented numbers of Afghan civilians will perish and be maimed this year if the increasing violence is not stemmed," UNAMA head Deborah Lyons said in a statement released with the report.

"I implore the Taliban and Afghan leaders to take heed to the conflict's grim and chilling trajectory and its devastating impact on civilians."

The Taliban rejected the UN report, reports AFP. Meanwhile, forty-six Afghan soldiers sought refuge in Pakistan after losing control of military positions across the border following advances by Taliban insurgents, Pakistan's army said yesterday. Hundreds of Afghan army soldiers and civil officials have fled to neighbouring Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan in recent weeks after Taliban offensives in border areas, reports Reuters.

NEWS

IN brief

6 Assam cops killed in border violence with Mizoram

Six police officers from Assam were killed in the fresh violence that broke out yesterday at the disputed Assam-Mizoram border, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said. There were reports of firing from the border area -- which lie over Assam's Cachar district and Mizoram's Kolasib district -- and attacks on government vehicles. The violence took place two days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah met all Chief Ministers of the northeast at Shillong. Shah has dialled chief ministers of both states and asked them to resolve the border issue, reported news agency ANI quoting sources. The CMs of two states clashed on Twitter, and tagged Shah in their posts.

'Political' slogans chanted at Tehran power cut protest

A number of people demonstrated in the centre of the Iranian capital Tehran yesterday against power cuts, the state television website reported, with some demonstrators chanting "political" slogans. It said a "limited gathering" began before noon when some shop owners at the Aladdin and Charsou malls, two of the city's main mobile and tech markets, marched down Jomhuri Street to "protest problems caused by power cuts." At the same time, a group tried to use the dissatisfaction and make it political" by chanting "norm-breaking slogans", the website added. The term "norm-breaking" is regularly used by Iranian media to refer to slogans critical of the authorities in the Islamic republic, reports AFP. A video posted on Twitter by the Fars news agency showed protesters blocking the busy street, with security forces present nearby.



Pollution turns Argentina lake bright pink

A lagoon in Argentina's southern Patagonia region has turned bright pink in a striking, but frightful phenomenon experts and activists blame on pollution by a chemical used to preserve prawns for export. The color is caused by sodium sulfite, an anti-bacterial product used in fish factories, whose waste is blamed for contaminating the Chubut river that feeds the Corfo lagoon and other water sources in the region, according to activists. Residents have long complained of foul smells and other environmental issues around the river and lagoon. "Those who should be in control are the ones who authorize the poisoning of people," environmental activist Pablo Lada told AFP, blaming the government for the mess.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



JULY 27

1921 - Canadians Sir Frederick Banting and Charles Best isolated insulin for the first time. It proved an effective treatment for diabetes.

1953 - The Korean armistice was signed at Panmunjom, ending the three-year Korean War in which 1.6 million North Koreans and Chinese and over 118,000 United Nations troops died.

1980 - The deposed shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, died in exile in Egypt.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Climate science report 'critical for success' of COP26: UN

AFP, PARIS

Nearly 200 nations started online negotiations yesterday to validate a UN science report that will anchor autumn summits charged with preventing climate catastrophe on a planetary scale.

"The report that you are going to finalise is going to be very important worldwide," World Meteorological Organization head Petteri Taalas told some 700 delegates by Zoom.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment "is critical for the success of the Glasgow climate conference in November," he said.

Record-smashing heatwaves, floods and drought across three continents in recent weeks -- all amplified by global warming -- have added pressure for decisive action.

"For years we have warned that all of this was possible, that all of this was coming," the UN's climate chief, Patricia Espinosa, said in a prepared statement.

A key G20 summit with climate on the agenda is slated for late October.

The world is a different place since the IPCC's last comprehensive overview in 2014 of global heating, past and future.

Lingering doubts that warming was

gathering pace or almost entirely human in origin, along with the falsely reassuring notion that climate impacts are tomorrow's problem, have since evaporated in the haze of deadly heatwaves and fires.

Another milestone since the last IPCC tome: the Paris Agreement has been adopted, with a collective promise to cap the planet's rising surface temperature at "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above late-19th century levels.

Carbon pollution from burning fossil fuels, methane leaks and agriculture has driven up the thermometer 1.1 degrees Celsius so far.

The 2015 treaty also features an aspirational limit on warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius, with many parties no doubt assuming this goal could be safely ignored.

But an IPCC special report in 2018 showed how much more devastating an extra 2 degrees Celsius would be, for humanity and the planet.

"1.5 Celsius became the de facto target" -- and proof of the IPCC's influence in shaping global policy, IPCC lead author and Maynooth University professor Peter Thorne told AFP.



A man walks down a flooded area in Yuyao near the city of Ningbo in eastern China's Zhejiang province yesterday, after heavy rains brought by the passage of Typhoon In-Fa inundated the eastern coast of China.

PHOTO: AFP



Birds fly off an abandoned wooden boat, seen from the German NGO migrant rescue ship Sea-Watch 3 in the search and rescue zone off the North African coast, in the western Mediterranean Sea yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

INCENDIARY BALLOON FIRES

Israel hits northern Gaza with air strikes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel hit Gaza with air strikes late Sunday after incendiary balloons launched from the Palestinian enclave caused fires in the Jewish state, with no reported injuries on either side.

The Israeli strikes targeted an open area in northern Gaza and a militant training site belonging to the strip's Hamas Islamist rulers in southern Khan Yunis, Palestinian security sources told AFP.

The strikes came after Israel cut by half the fishing zone off the blockaded coastal territory, a common response following projectile attacks by armed groups in Gaza.

Israel's army had no immediate comment on the strikes. But the military branch responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories (COGAT) said the fishing zone had been reduced from 12 nautical miles to six.

"The decision was made following the continued launching of incendiary balloons from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, which constitutes a violation of Israeli sovereignty," it said in a statement.

Stop 'demonising' China

Beijing urges Washington as US official visits

AFP, Beijing

Rancour marked the start of yesterday's talks between Beijing and the highest-level US envoy to visit under President Joe Biden's administration, as Beijing urged Washington to stop "demonising" China while the US made a "forceful" case against China's human rights violations.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's visit to the northern city of Tianjin is the first major meeting between the world's leading economies since March discussions in Anchorage between the countries' top diplomats collapsed into mudslinging.

The preamble to Sherman's trip said she aimed to seek "guardrails" as ties deteriorate on a range of issues from cybersecurity and tech supremacy to human rights in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

But the tone was set early in the day in statements published by Beijing.

"The hope may be that by demonising China, the US could somehow... blame

China for its own structural problems," Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng told Sherman, in a readout issued by China's foreign ministry early yesterday.

"We urge the United States to change its highly misguided mindset and dangerous policy," the statement quoted Xie as saying, adding that Washington views China as an "imagined enemy." He claimed that Chinese people view the United States' "adversarial rhetoric as a thinly veiled attempt to contain and suppress China", in comments reminiscent of the fiery exchange between Washington and Beijing's top diplomats Antony Blinken and Yang Jiechi in Alaska in March.

Sherman tweeted yesterday that she "spoke about the United States' commitment to healthy competition, protecting human rights and democratic values" with Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Sherman also had raised various concerns about China's violations of rights in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet.