

NEWS IN brief

Facebook assembles team to build 'metaverse'

Facebook on Monday said it was combining specialists from across its hardware, gaming and virtual reality units to build an immersive digital world known as the "metaverse".

Antibodies from Sinovac's shot fade after about 6 months

Antibodies triggered by Sinovac Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine declined below a key threshold from around six months after a second dose for most recipients.



Mamata meets Modi, seeks SC probe on Pegasus scam

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his official residence in New Delhi.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, THE STATESMAN

Two Koreas restore hotlines

AFP, Seoul

North and South Korea signalled a surprise thaw in relations yesterday, announcing the restoration of cross-border communications that were severed more than a year ago.

The joint announcement, which coincided with the anniversary of the end of the Korean War, was the first positive development since a series of summits between the North's Kim Jong Un and the South's President Moon Jae-in in 2018 failed to achieve any significant breakthrough.

The two sides revealed that Kim and Moon had exchanged a series of letters since April in which they agreed that re-establishing hotlines would be a productive



first step in re-booting relations between the two rivals who, despite the end of their 1950-53 conflict, remain technically at war.

US ends Iraq combat role

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden declared US relations with Iraq would enter a new phase with American troops exiting combat operations in the country by year-end as he held talks with Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi.

Amid the threat of an Islamic State resurgence and Iran's powerful influence in Baghdad, Biden stressed that Washington remains "committed to our security cooperation" while Kadhemi reaffirmed their "strategic partnership."

Eighteen years after the US invaded Iraq to remove strongman Saddam Hussein, and seven years after a US-led coalition battled Islamic State extremists who threatened



the country, Washington now says its 2500 troops in the country will help Baghdad to fight Covid-19, confront the impacts of climate change, and support private sector development.

First person charged under HK security law

Judges finds former waiter guilty of terrorism, inciting secession in a landmark case

REUTERS, Hong Kong

The first person charged under Hong Kong's national security law was found guilty yesterday of terrorism and inciting secession in a landmark case that carries long-term implications for how the legislation will reshape the city's common law traditions.

Former waiter Tong Ying-kit, 24, was accused of driving his motorcycle into three riot policemen while carrying a flag with the protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times," which prosecutors said was secessionist.

The widely anticipated ruling, much of which has hinged on the interpretation of the slogan, imposes new limits on free speech in the former British colony. Pro-democracy activists and human rights groups have also criticised the decision to deny Tong bail and a jury trial.

His trial was presided over by judges Esther Toh, Anthea Pang and Wilson Chan, picked by city leader Carrie Lam to hear national security cases. Toh read out a summary of the ruling in court, saying "such display of the words was capable of inciting others to commit secession."

She added that Tong was aware of the slogan's secessionist meaning, and that he intended to communicate this meaning to others. He also had a "political agenda" and his actions caused "grave harm to society."

Tong had pleaded not guilty to all charges, which stemmed from events on July 1, 2020, shortly after the law was enacted.

The governments in Beijing and Hong Kong have said repeatedly the security law was necessary to bring stability after the often-violent 2019 protests and that the rights and freedoms promised to the city upon its return to Chinese rule in 1997 remain intact.

Beijing's claims have 'no basis'

Says Pentagon chief, insists US committed to stable ties with China

AFP, Singapore

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin yesterday said that Beijing's expansive claims in the South China Sea have "no basis in international law", taking aim at China's growing assertiveness in the hotly contested waters.

Austin's broadside came at the start of his first trip to Southeast Asia as US defence secretary, as he seeks to rally allies in the region as a bulwark to China.

President Joe Biden's administration wants to reset relations with Asian countries and build alliances to face Beijing, after the turbulence and unpredictability of the Trump era.

Speaking in Singapore, Austin criticised China's actions in the disputed sea, where Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with several Southeast Asian states.

"Beijing's claim to the vast majority of the South China Sea has no basis in international law," he said in a speech hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank.

"That assertion treads on the sovereignty of the states in the region," he said, adding that the US

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW



would support countries in defending their rights.

China claims almost all of the resource-rich sea, through which trillions of dollars in shipping trade passes annually, with competing claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Beijing has been accused of deploying a range of military hardware including anti-ship missiles and surface-to-air missiles there, and ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its historical claim over most of the waters to be without basis.

Austin said that the US "will not flinch

when our interests are threatened" -- but he insisted Washington does "not seek confrontation" with China.

"I am committed to pursuing a constructive, stable relationship with China, including stronger crisis communications with the People's Liberation Army."

The US-China relationship has deteriorated over a range of issues from cybersecurity and tech supremacy to human rights in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Biden has largely kept the hawkish stance on China of Donald Trump, describing the Asian power as the pre-eminent challenge to the US.

After Singapore, Austin will visit Vietnam and the Philippines, and will seek to underline that the US is a "stabilising force" in Southeast Asia, said a senior defence official.

Austin's visit is the latest by a senior US official to Asia.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is arriving in India today, where he will speak about supporting Afghanistan as worries grow in New Delhi about Taliban gains as US-led foreign forces withdraw.



With donations, Bhutan vaccinates 85pc of its population

AFP, Thimphu

Bhutan has inoculated most of its eligible population with second doses of Covid-19 vaccinations in a week, in a speedy rollout hailed by Unicef as a "success story" for international donations.

More than 454,000 shots were administered over the past week in the remote Himalayan kingdom -- just over 85 percent of the eligible adult population of more than 530,000 people -- after a recent flood of foreign donations.

UNICEF's Bhutan representative, Will Parks, hailed the ambitious vaccination drive as a "great success story for Bhutan".

"And if there's anything that I hope the world that can learn, is that a country like Bhutan with very few doctors, very few nurses but a really committed king and leadership in the government mobilising society -- it's not impossible to vaccinate the whole country."

The tiny nation had quickly used up

most of the 550,000 AstraZeneca jabs donated by India in late March and early April for first jabs, before the neighbouring country halted exports over a massive local surge in infections.

Half a million Moderna doses donated by the United States via Covax -- the distributor backed by the World Health Organization and the Gavi vaccine alliance -- and another 250,000 AstraZeneca shots from Denmark arrived in mid-July.

More than 150,000 AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Sinopharm shots are also expected to arrive in the South Asian nation of 770,000 people from Croatia, Bulgaria, China and other countries.

The government has meanwhile bought 200,000 Pfizer doses that are expected to be delivered later this year.

Bhutan, wedged between India and China and famous for measuring gross national happiness, has reported just under 2,500 Covid-19 infections and two deaths so far.

At least 57 migrants die off Libya coast: UN

REUTERS, Geneva

At least 57 people drowned on Monday after a boat capsized off the Libyan coast near Khums, the latest tragedy in the Mediterranean where nearly 1,000 have perished this year, the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

Bodies have not been recovered from the shipwreck, but survivors included migrants from Nigeria, Ghana and Gambia, IOM spokeswoman Safa Msehli told Reuters.

"According to survivors brought to shore by fishermen and the coast guard, at least 20 women and two children were among those who drowned," she said.

The migrants, the majority from West Africa, departed from Khums, presumably to reach Europe, Msehli said.

The deaths of 57 migrants brings the number of lives lost on the central Mediterranean crossing route this year to around 970, the United Nations said yesterday.

POST-COUP CRISIS IN MYANMAR UN special rapporteur calls for 'Covid ceasefire'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar yesterday called on the UN Security Council and member states to push for an emergency "Covid ceasefire" in light of an explosion of Covid-19 infections and deaths in Myanmar where attacks against the health workers escalated.

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews stressed the urgent need for the member states to use all the tools of the UN, including passage of resolutions, demanding that the State Administrative Council (SAC) immediately cease all attacks, especially against health care professionals who are desperately needed to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Too many in Myanmar have needlessly perished and too many more will die without action by the United Nations," Andrews warned.

Myanmar junta since taking over power from elected government in February, has murdered at least 931 people and is holding at least 5,630 in arbitrary detention where they are in danger of being infected with the virus, the statement said.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়, সওজ
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Corrigendum-4
Tender Name: Supply, Installation and Commissioning and Testing of 10 (ten) X-ray Baggage Scanners and 01 (One) MW Human Body Scanners.