

BORDER CLASHES

Assam issues travel advisory for Mizoram

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian state of Assam has advised its residents to avoid travelling to neighbouring Mizoram after six policemen were shot dead in a rare border clash between the two regions.

India's northeast has been a hotbed of ethnic tensions since independence in 1947 and borders between its seven states are not clearly defined.

Assam and Mizoram have been wrangling over their frontier for decades, but tensions erupted on Monday with six police shot dead and more than 60 injured.

"Given the critical situation, the people of Assam are advised not to travel to Mizoram," the travel advisory issued Thursday said. It recommended those already there "exercise utmost caution".

Both states have blamed each other for the violence. K. Vanlalvena, a Mizoram politician in India's upper house, stoked tensions on Wednesday when he was quoted by media as saying his state was ready for more violence.

"More than 200 policemen entered our territory and they pushed back our policemen from our own posts and they gave firing orders first, before we fired," Vanlalvena reportedly said. "They are lucky that we didn't kill them all. If they come again, we shall kill them all."



PHOTO: REUTERS

Relatives of Shawkat Awad, who was killed by Israeli troops during clashes, according to the Palestinian health ministry, mourn during his funeral near Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. He was killed when Israeli troops clashed with protesters on Thursday during the funeral of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy who was shot dead by soldiers a day earlier, the Palestinian health ministry said.

FIRST JAILING IN HONG KONG UNDER CONTROVERSIAL SECURITY LAW

Waiter gets 9 yrs in jail

REUTERS, Hong Kong

The first person convicted under Hong Kong's national security law was jailed for nine years yesterday for terrorist activities and inciting secession, judges said, in a watershed ruling with long-term implications for the city's judicial landscape.

Former waiter Tong Ying-kit, 24, was accused of driving his motorcycle into three riot police last year while carrying a flag with the protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong. Revolution of our times."

Tong's lawyer, Clive Grossman, told reporters outside the court the defence would appeal both the verdict and the sentence. He made no further comment.

Judges Esther Toh, Anthea Pang and Wilson Chan - picked by city leader Carrie Lam to hear national security cases - ruled on Tuesday that the slogan was "capable of inciting others to commit secession".

Yesterday, the judges sentenced Tong to 6.5 years for inciting secession and 8 years for terrorist activities. Of these, 2.5 years will run consecutively, resulting in a total term of 9 years.

In their reasons for sentencing, the judges wrote: "whoever carries

out terrorist activities with a view to intimidating the public in order to pursue political agenda, whatever that is, should be condemned and punished.

"But when the political agenda is secessionist in nature, it is our view that there is an added criminality



in that such an agenda is seeking to undermine national unification."

Human rights groups have criticised Tong's conviction, saying it imposes new limits on free speech, as well as the precedents set by the trial, which they say contrast with Hong Kong's common law traditions.

"The sentencing of Tong Ying-kit to nine years confirms fears that the national security law is not merely a tool to instil terror into government critics in Hong Kong; it is a weapon

that will be used to incarcerate them," Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Regional Director Yamini Mishra said in a statement.

The Hong Kong government did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the accusations but Secretary for Security Chris Tang told reporters he welcomed the sentence.

"The court has ruled that the slogan connotes Hong Kong independence," Tang said. "If you say this slogan, you need to bear the consequences."

Tong was denied bail in line with a provision of the national security law that puts the onus on the defendant to prove they would not be a security threat if released. Tong also did not get a trial by jury because of "a perceived risk of the personal safety of jurors and their family members or that due administration of justice might be impaired".

Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have repeatedly said that all the rights and freedoms promised to the former British colony upon its return to Chinese rule in 1997 were intact, but that national security was a red line. All cases have been handled in accordance with the law, both governments have said.

CDC: Delta variant as contagious as chickenpox

Warns strain causes more severe infection

REUTERS

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is as contagious as chickenpox and could cause severe illness, according to an internal document at the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The New York Times reported.

The variant was also more likely to break through protections afforded by the vaccines, the report said, adding that CDC's decision to reverse course on masking guidelines for fully vaccinated citizens on Tuesday is based on the document.

The agency had previously said the vaccinated did not need to wear masks indoors.

Still, the CDC's figures show that the vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalisation and death in vaccinated people, according to experts quoted by the newspaper.

The Delta variant is more transmissible than the viruses that cause MERS, SARS, Ebola, the common cold, the seasonal flu and smallpox, the report said.

The immediate next step for the agency is to "acknowledge the war has changed", the report cited the document as saying before adding that the CDC is expected to publish additional data on the variant on Friday.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky told the Times that new research showed the vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant carried tremendous amounts of the virus in the nose and throat.

Washington has resorted to increasingly blunt methods to encourage the remaining citizens to be vaccinated, including requiring federal employees to get the job or be subject to mandatory testing and other restrictions. On Thursday, the Biden administration called on state and local governments to offer \$100 payments for newly vaccinated Americans, funded by \$350bn in aid granted under the American Rescue Plan Act.

NEWS

IN brief

Tunisia president promises democracy to US's Blinken

Tunisia's President Kais Saied on Thursday appointed a former national security adviser as interior minister, days after grabbing power in what his opponents labelled a "coup". The new appointee, Ridha Gharssallouji, is also a top ranking former police official, local media reported. Tunisians are waiting for the appointment of a new prime minister and the announcement of a road map to emerge from the crisis. While the president's actions fuelled political turmoil, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday that Saied had promised him he was committed to democracy. But Blinken also urged action, including the restoration of parliament, which the Tunisian president suspended on Sunday for 30 days as he seized all executive powers. The young democracy had often been cited as the sole success story of the Arab Spring.

Lanka ends work-from-home option for civil servants

Sri Lanka yesterday announced it was ending its work-from-home option for civil servants, ordering all 1.2 million back to the office from Monday despite a surge in coronavirus infections. The island's top bureaucrat, PB Jayasundera, said there was no need for officials to work from home since "the majority... have been vaccinated". The move came even as Sri Lanka recorded a doubling in daily Covid-19 cases to around 2,000 compared to early July, with hospitals struggling to cope. Government figures show that 9.17 million people, or 43 percent of the population, have had one vaccine dose, and more than two million people have received two shots. Sri Lanka has recorded at least 4,300 coronavirus deaths and almost 305,000 infections in total, according to official data seen widely as an underestimate.



Philippines restores key US military deal

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has walked back on a decision to end a key military deal with the United States, his defence secretary said yesterday during a visit by Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin. Duterte told the United States in February last year he planned to axe the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) after Washington cancelled the visa of a close ally who led his internationally condemned war on drugs. The 1998 VFA provides the legal framework for the US to hold joint military exercises and operations in the Philippines and is a key component of their decades-long alliance. It is also seen as a bulwark against China's growing clout in the region.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



JULY 31

- 1658** - Aurangzeb appoints himself Mongol emperor
- 1792** - Cornerstone laid for 1st US government building: US Mint in Philadelphia
- 1954** - Mount Godwin-Austen (K2) in the Himalayas was first climbed by an Italian expedition led by Ardito Desio.
- 1971** - Apollo 15 astronauts take 6½ hour electric car ride on Moon.
- 1991** - Russia and US sign long range nuclear weapons reduction pact.
- 2006** - Cuba's President Fidel Castro undergoes surgery, delegates government functions to brother Raul.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Myanmar democracy movement moves out of Suu Kyi's shadow

AFP, Yangon

Imprisoned by the military, detained Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi is isolated from the young protesters now forging their own struggle for democracy outside of her shadow.

Sunday marks six months since her National League for Democracy (NLD) government was ousted, setting off a mass uprising and violent military crackdown that has killed nearly 1,000 people.

Suu Kyi remains a revered figure locally for her courageous opposition to a previous junta, despite her international reputation suffering after she governed in a power-sharing deal with the generals.

But for many still fighting the revolution must go further than the movement the Nobel laureate led decades ago, and permanently root out military dominance of the country's politics and economy.

Suu Kyi still has the respect and love of many in Myanmar, said Manny Maung, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, "but more as a historical figure."

The democracy campaign "no longer wants an icon", she added.

"They have a much more decentralised approach to power and



want to see the emergence of diverse political forces."

Some have also shunned nonviolence -- a core principle of Suu Kyi's.

Off the streets, a shadow "National Unity Government" of ousted lawmakers from Suu Kyi's party is working to garner international support and direct opposition to the junta without her.

But within its ranks are "strong divisions between the old guard loyal to Suu Kyi and the progressive wing that is eager for renewal," Maung told AFP.

The group recently invited the

country's Rohingya community to join the fight against the junta, promising an end to discriminatory policies against the stateless minority.

The use of the word "Rohingya" was new -- Suu Kyi's government had refused to even use the term.

Her refusal to condemn a brutal 2017 crackdown that sent 750,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh sorely damaged her reputation abroad, especially after she travelled to The Hague to defend the generals against genocide charges.

'Absolute nonsense'

Imran Khan rejects claim Pakistan helping Taliban; first evacuation flight brings over 200 Afghans to US

AGENCIES

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has denied a report that Pakistani fighters have crossed the border into Afghanistan to aid the Taliban in its fight against the Afghan government.

"This is absolute nonsense", Khan said in an interview with PBS NewsHour anchor Judy Woodruff.

Prime Minister Khan also said that Pakistan has suffered tremendously during the long US war in Afghanistan.

He said his government would not allow the United States to set up any bases inside Pakistan to do intelligence work or carry out counterinsurgency operations.

"We do not have the capacity to have any more fighting within our borders, any terrorism within our country," Khan said.

"When we were in the height of that war on terror, which Pakistan joined, there were suicide bombs taking place all over the country. The businesses collapsed, tourism collapsed. So what we do not want to be as part of any conflict," he said.

Khan said Pakistan pushed the Taliban to negotiate with the US over ending the conflict in Afghanistan and added the best political outcome in Afghanistan is an "inclusive government".



"This is the best outcome. There is no other outcome because the military solution has failed", he said.

Meanwhile, the first flight carrying Afghans who worked as interpreters for the US has arrived in America, President Joe Biden said yesterday, the start of an operation to evacuate thousands from possible Taliban retaliation.

Around 20,000 Afghans worked for the US following the 2001 invasion in the wake of the September 11 attacks and have applied for evacuation under the State Department's so-called Special Immigrant Visas program.

Some estimates suggest the total number of prospective evacuees under Operation Allies Refuge could be as high as 100,000 once family members are included.

Many of them fear retaliation from the Taliban, which has secured a vast swath of the country since foreign troops began the last stage of a withdrawal due to be complete by late August.

Russ Travers, an official on the White House National Security Council, said the first arrivals -- numbering around 200 -- will complete health checks and other processing before being sent to new homes across the country.

3 Americans create enough emissions to kill one: study

The lifestyles of around three average Americans will create enough planet-heating emissions to kill one person, and the emissions from a single coal-fired power plant are likely to result in more than 900 deaths, according to the first analysis to calculate the moral cost of carbon emissions. The analysis draws upon several public health studies to conclude that for every 4,434 metric tons of CO2 pumped into the atmosphere beyond the 2020 rate of emissions, one person globally will die prematurely from the increased temperature. This additional CO2 is equivalent to the current lifetime emissions of 3.5 Americans. The research, published in Nature Communications,



illustrates the vast disparities in the emissions generated by people's consumption in different countries around the world. While it takes just 3.5 Americans to create enough emissions in a lifetime to kill one person, it would take 25 Brazilians or 146 Nigerians to do the same, the paper found.

Half of Myanmar may get infected by Covid in 2 weeks!

Britain warned the United Nations Security Council Thursday that half of coup-wracked Myanmar's population of 54 million could become infected with Covid-19 within the next two weeks. The UK convened the meeting in response to what it called the "dire" coronavirus situation in Myanmar, which has "spiralled" since the military seized control in February. Britain urged the Council to ensure resolution 2565, which demands ceasefires in conflict zones to allow the safe delivery of coronavirus vaccines, is respected in Myanmar. The impoverished nation has been in turmoil since the junta took power, with many hospitals ill-

equipped to cope with a surging caseload after many medical staff walked out in protest at the coup. The UN estimates that only 40 percent of the Myanmar's health care facilities are still able to function. The world body also estimates that junta forces have carried out at least 260 attacks against medical personnel and facilities, detaining at least 67 medical officials. "With the new wave of COVID-19 spreading like wildfire across the country, it is unfortunate that more lives will be lost as the Myanmar military weaponizes COVID-19 against the people," said national unity government spokesperson Susanna Hla Hla Soe.

Russian space module mishap knocks ISS out of position

Flight controllers have regained control of the International Space Station (ISS) after it was knocked off course by a newly arrived Russian research module. Thursday's mishap saw the jet thrusters of the multipurpose Nauka module inadvertently fire about three hours after it had latched on to the orbiting outpost, briefly throwing it out of control, officials with the United States space agency Nasa said. The module's jets inexplicably restarted, causing the entire ISS to pitch out of its normal flight position some 400km (250 miles) above the Earth. Flight teams on the ground managed to restore the ISS's orientation by activating thrusters on another module of the orbiting



platform, Nasa officials said. The malfunction prompted Nasa to postpone until at least August 3 its planned launch of Boeing's new CST-100 Starliner capsule on a highly anticipated uncrewed test flight to the space station.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, THE NEWS TODAY