

Quotes of the day



When unbridled oppression is unleashed & gross injustice heaped there is no other choice but to resist to exist.

MEHBOOBA MUFTI, FORMER KASHMIR CM, AHEAD OF 2ND ANNIVERSARY OF NEW DELHI IMPOSED DIRECT RULE ON INDIAN KASHMIR



What happened is a shameful chapter in our national story.

PRIME MINISTER SCOTT MORRISON ON AUSTRALIA'S TREATMENT OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION AS HE ANNOUNCES REPARATIONS FOR 'STOLEN GENERATION'



A wildfire approaches the Olympic Academy in ancient Olympia in western Greece, on Wednesday. Greek firefighters yesterday battled to bring under control two major fires raging near Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic games, and on the island of Evia as the country swelters in a record-breaking heatwave.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

No plan to house India military base: Mauritius

Mauritius has denied a report that it has allowed India to build a military base on the remote island of Agalega, with a government official telling AFP that no such agreement exists between the two nations. Earlier this week, news broadcaster Al Jazeera reported on the construction of an airstrip and two jetties to house an Indian military base on Agalega, located about 1,000 kilometres north of the archipelago's main island. But on Wednesday, Ken Arian, a communications adviser to Mauritius PM Pravind Jugnauth, denied any plans to allow a military installation on Agalega, home to about 300 people. Arian told AFP that although work was under way on two projects agreed during Indian PM Narendra Modi's 2015 visit to Mauritius -- a three-kilometre (1.8-mile) air strip and a jetty -- they would not be used for military purposes.

Mob in Pakistan sacks Hindu temple over blasphemy row

Dozens of people attacked a Hindu temple in central Pakistan over blasphemy allegations, police said yesterday, in the latest incident of religious-fueled violence targeting a minority group in the Islamic republic. Police said the mob attacked the temple in Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab province Wednesday afternoon following the release on bail of a young Hindu boy accused of blasphemy. The boy had earlier been arrested over rumours that he committed blasphemy. Such allegations are explosive and often result in furious outcries among large ultra-conservative groups in the Islamic republic.

Mexico sues US gunmakers over arms trafficking

Mexico said it filed a lawsuit against major US gunmakers in a Boston court on Wednesday over illegal cross-border arms flows that it blamed for fueling rampant drug-related violence. The Latin American nation, which has long faced pressure from the United States to curb narcotics smuggling, wants its neighbor to crack down on firearms trafficking in the other direction. This kind of legal action is unprecedented for the Mexican government and has the backing of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard told a news conference. The companies named in the suit include Smith & Wesson, Beretta, Colt, Glock, Century Arms, Ruger and Barrett. Together they manufacture more than two-thirds of the over half a million weapons that are illegally brought into Mexico each year, according to the Mexican authorities. The lawsuit seeks compensation -- of an amount to be determined during the trial -- for the damage caused by the firms' "negligent practices," Ebrard said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



AUGUST 06

1914 - Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia, and Serbia declared war on Germany in WWI.

1945 - The US Air Force dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. At least 117,000 people were killed.

1991 - Tim Berners-Lee releases files describing his idea for the World Wide Web.

2012 - Nasa's Curiosity rover lands on Mars.

SOURCE: REUTERS

WHO 'deeply concerned' by Long Covid

Says unknown numbers of people are suffering from this still 'unknown' phenomenon

AFP, Geneva

With nearly 200 million people known to have had Covid-19, the WHO said it was deeply concerned by the unknown numbers who may still be suffering with Long Covid.

The World Health Organization urged people struggling with the after-effects of the virus -- despite having recovered from the acute phase -- to seek medical help.

Long Covid remains one of the most mysterious aspects of the pandemic.

"This post-Covid syndrome, or Long Covid, is something that WHO is deeply concerned about," Maria Van Kerkhove, the UN health agency's Covid-19 technical lead, told a press conference on Wednesday.

The WHO was "making sure that we have recognition of this, because this is real".

She said of those infected with SARS-CoV-2 -- the virus which causes Covid-19 disease -- "many are suffering from long term effects".

"We don't know for how long these effects last

and we're even working on a case definition to better understand and describe what this post-Covid syndrome is," said Van Kerkhove.

She said the WHO was working to have better rehabilitation programmes for Long Covid sufferers plus broader research to gain a better understanding of what the syndrome is and how it can be managed.

The WHO has held a series of seminars this year aimed at expanding understanding of post-Covid conditions, hearing not only from scientists and doctors but also directly from sufferers themselves.

Little is known about why some people, after coming through the acute phase, struggle to recover and suffer ongoing symptoms including shortness of breath, extreme fatigue and brain fog as well as cardiac and neurological disorders.

Janet Diaz, the clinical care lead in the WHO's emergencies programme who leads the organisation's Long Covid efforts, said there had been more than 20 reported symptoms.

They include chest pain, tingling and rashes, she

told a WHO live social media session on Tuesday.

Diaz said some patients had symptoms that dragged on from the acute phase; others got better and then relapsed, with conditions that could come and go; while others had symptoms that only appeared after recovering from the acute phase.

Studies can only go back as far as the first patients to recover from Covid-19, which first emerged in China in December 2019.

Diaz said some people seemed to have post-Covid conditions for three months, and others up to six months.

"We are concerned there may be a small proportion that go on to nine months -- and to longer than that," said Diaz.

The US expert said it was not yet fully understood what caused the post-viral symptoms, with various hypotheses including neurological problems, the immune response to the infection, and the virus persisting in some organs.

Van Kerkhove said: "We advise anyone who is suffering from the long-term effects to seek help."

Pressure, sanctions won't work on Iran

Warns new President Raisi, says he'll back any diplomatic moves to lift sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday said he will support "any diplomatic plans" to lift US sanctions but that foreign pressure will not make Tehran back down from its "rights".

Ultraconservative Raisi takes over from moderate Hassan Rouhani, whose landmark achievement during his two-term presidency was the 2015 nuclear agreement between the Islamic republic and six world powers.

Iran has been grappling with a deep economic and social crisis following former US president Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw Washington from the nuclear deal in 2018 and impose crushing sanctions.

"Sanctions against the nation of Iran must be lifted. We will support any diplomatic plans that will realise this goal," he said as he was sworn in during a televised ceremony.

But "the policy of pressure and sanctions will not cause the nation of Iran to back down from following up on its legal rights," he said, while reiterating Tehran's official position of pursuing solely "peaceful" nuclear technology.

The former judiciary chief officially began his four-year mandate on Tuesday when he was inaugurated by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Yesterday, he was sworn in before Iran's parliament, to which he will present his cabinet list early next week, state television reported.

Six rounds of nuclear talks between Iran and



Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi kisses the Quran during his swearing-in ceremony at the parliament in Tehran, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

world powers were held in Vienna between April and June in an attempt to revive the accord. The last round concluded on June 20, with no date set for another.

Raisi also emphasised that one of his administration's main foreign policy priorities will be improving relations with regional countries.

"I extend the hand of friendship and brotherhood to all countries in the region, especially our neighbours," he said.

Raisi had previously said there are "no obstacles" to restoring ties with Saudi Arabia, a US ally and the Islamic republic's rival in the Middle East.

Tehran and Riyadh have been engaged in talks hosted by Baghdad since April with the aim of improving relations.

Security tight in J&K for 'black day' anniversary

AFP, Srinagar

Hundreds of extra police and troops were deployed in the main city of Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday as separatist groups called for a shutdown to mark a "black day" on the second anniversary of New Delhi imposing direct rule.

Prime PM Modi's government scrapped the region's partial autonomy on August 5, 2019, and split it into two federal territories, arresting thousands in a massive security operation and communications blackout that lasted months.

Ahead of the second anniversary, security forces erected numerous new checkpoints and barricades across Srinagar. Yesterday, most shops remained closed in Srinagar and vehicular movement on the roads was thin.

Former Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti issued an angry statement on Wednesday slamming New Delhi's actions as "daylight robbery" of people's constitutional rights.

EU accuses Taliban of breaking commitment

Pakistan plays down its influence on militants

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday condemned the Taliban's latest deadly attacks in Afghanistan and demanded "an urgent, comprehensive and permanent ceasefire".

In a statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and EU commissioner for aid and crisis management Janecz Lenarcic accused the Taliban of breaking its promise to seek a negotiated peace.

"This senseless violence is inflicting immense suffering upon Afghan citizens and is increasing the number of internally displaced persons in search of safety and shelter," they said.

"The Taliban's military offensive is in direct contradiction to their stated commitment to a negotiated settlement of the conflict and the Doha peace process," the statement continued.

"Some of these acts (recent Taliban attacks) could amount to war crimes and will have to be investigated. Those Taliban fighters or commanders responsible must be held accountable."

The statement singled out three recent attacks in particular, one on the UN office in Herat, an offensive in Lashkar Gah that killed 40 civilians and an assault on the defence minister's residence in Kabul.

Fighting in Afghanistan's long-running conflict began to intensify in May, when US and other foreign forces began the first stage of a withdrawal due to be completed later this month. The Taliban already control large swathes of the countryside and are now challenging Afghan government forces in several large cities.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's national security advisor on Wednesday said that Afghanistan's government and the Taliban must both compromise and reach a peace settlement.

Wrapping up a week of talks in Washington, Moeed Yusuf played down the level of influence on the Taliban played by Pakistan, which was one of only three nations to recognize the hardline Islamist regime that was toppled in a US invasion after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

"Whatever limited leverage we had, we used," he said, pointing to Pakistan encouraging the Taliban to enter talks with the Afghan government in Doha.

"Now with the troop withdrawal, that leverage has logically gone down further."



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Cuomo faces criminal probes

AFP, New York

Lauded nationwide last year for his no-nonsense coronavirus briefings, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was clinging to his political life Wednesday as prosecutors opened criminal inquiries into sexual harassment allegations against the powerful Democrat.

Prosecutors in Manhattan, Westchester, and Long Island joined those in Albany in opening criminal probes after Tuesday's bombshell report found Cuomo sexually harassed multiple women.

The investigation concluded that Cuomo engaged in "unwelcome and non-consensual touching and making numerous comments of a suggestive sexual nature that created a hostile work environment for women."

Australia to make reparations for 'stolen generation'

Australia will provide one-off cash payments of US\$60,000 to many Indigenous Australians who were forcibly removed from their families as children, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced yesterday, to redress what he described as a "shameful" period in the nation's history. Thousands of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were taken from their homes and put in foster care with white families under official assimilation policies that persisted into the 1970s. "What happened is a shameful chapter in our national story," Morrison told parliament of the "Stolen Generation" of Indigenous Australians. "We have already confronted it with the national apology but our deeds must continue to match our words," he said. Campaigners for the rights of Indigenous Australians, who remain heavily disadvantaged in terms of health, income



and education, welcomed the announcement but said it was long overdue. Morrison said US\$280 million would be allocated to redress the human damage of the assimilation policy. The "Stolen Generation" reparations are the centrepiece of a so-called Closing the Gap plan, supported by the conservative coalition government and the opposition, which also sets out an array of reforms and goals for improving the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Myanmar envoy alerts UN to alleged 'massacre'

Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations, who has refused to leave his post despite being fired after the February coup, has alerted the world body to a "reported massacre" by the military junta. Kyaw Moe Tun sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday saying 40 bodies had been found in Kani township in July in the Sagaing area of northwestern Myanmar. The junta has denied the massacre, while AFP has not been able to independently verify the reports due to mobile networks being cut in the remote region. The representative wrote that soldiers tortured and killed 16 men in a village in the township around July 9 and 10, after which 10,000 residents fled the area. He said a further 13 bodies were discovered in the days following clashes between local fighters and security forces on July 26. Kyaw Moe Tun added that another 11 men, including

a 14-year-old boy, were killed and set on fire in a separate village on July 28. In the letter, the ambassador repeated his call for a global arms embargo on the ruling junta and "urgent humanitarian intervention" from the international community. "We cannot let the military keep on doing this kind of atrocity in Myanmar," Kyaw Moe Tun told AFP. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army ousted the civilian leadership on February 1, launching a crackdown on dissent that has killed more than 900 people, according to a local monitoring group. Kyaw Moe Tun has brushed aside the junta's claims that he no longer represents Myanmar. The United Nations still considers him as the rightful envoy. Myanmar's junta chief said on Sunday elections would be held and a state of emergency lifted by August 2023, extending the military's initial one-year timeline announced days after the coup.

'Vote fraud' claims: Brazil SC orders probe against Bolsonaro

A Supreme Court justice ruled Wednesday President Jair Bolsonaro should be investigated for unproven claims Brazil's voting system is riddled with fraud, adding the far-right leader to an ongoing probe on the spread of fake news by his government. The ruling by Justice Alexandre de Moraes came after Bolsonaro stepped up his longtime attacks on Brazil's electronic voting system, claiming -- without evidence -- that it is fraud-plagued and insisting there will be no elections next year as scheduled if it is not overhauled. The Superior Electoral Court had asked the Supreme Court to issue the ruling, after itself putting the president under investigation for his campaign against Brazil's voting system. The Supreme Court agreed, finding Bolsonaro should face investigation for slander and inciting criminal acts for his undocumented claims of massive vote fraud. The electoral court's own probe



will investigate the president for abuse of office, improper use of official communication channels, corruption, fraud and other potential crimes. Bolsonaro has long criticized electronic voting, introduced in Brazil in 1996. He has stepped up his attacks in the build-up to the October 2022 elections. Opinion polls place the 66-year-old leader well behind leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in the presidential race.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS