

MORE NEWS

US imposes sanctions on Cuban officials, military unit

The US Treasury Department said on Friday it was imposing sanctions on two Cuban Ministry of Interior officials and a military unit over the government's crackdown on protesters last month. The department said it was sanctioning Romarico Vidal Sotomayor Garcia and Pedro Orlando Martinez Fernandez and the Tropas de Prevencion (TDP) of the Cuban Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces. "Today's action shines a spotlight on additional perpetrators responsible for suppressing the Cuban people's calls for freedom and respect for human rights," said Andrea Gacki, director of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said TDP soldiers had been deployed "and have reportedly attacked and beaten protesters, while making violent arrests." The protests erupted amid Communist-ruled Cuba's worst economic crisis since the fall of its old ally, the Soviet Union, and a record surge in coronavirus infections.

New York Assembly will not seek to impeach Cuomo

Lawmakers in the New York Assembly will suspend their impeachment investigation of Governor Andrew Cuomo in light of his promise to step down from office over sexual harassment complaints, Speaker Carl Heastie said in a statement on Friday. The Assembly, controlled by Cuomo's fellow Democrats, opened the impeachment investigation in March after at least two women who formerly worked for the governor went public with complaints that Cuomo had sexually harassed them. The decision means that Cuomo will not face the prospect of a ban from seeking elected office again in New York. A damning report released this month by New York Attorney General Letitia James, also a Democrat, concluded Cuomo had broken state and federal law by kissing, groping or making lewd comments to at least 11 women, including aides and a state trooper.

One dead, two missing as torrential rains slam Japan

One woman was dead and two people were missing on Saturday after torrential rains touched off a landslide and engulfed at least two houses in western Japan, with rivers overflowing their banks as rain continued to pound the area. Japan broadened its highest level 5 risk alerts to cover more than 1.5 million people, NHK public broadcaster said, while the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) warned of more rain to come over the next few days. Rivers broke their banks in several cities. Landslides hit several parts of Nagasaki prefecture, with one sweeping away at least two houses and killing Fumiyu Mori, 59. Her husband and daughter were missing, and military personnel joined rescuers looking for them, NHK said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Locals react as they stand near partially collapsed buildings as the area was hit by flash floods that swept through towns in the Turkish Black Sea region, in the town of Bozkurt, in Kastamonu province, Turkey, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Turkey flood toll hits 44

REUTERS, Bozkurt

Families of those missing after Turkey's worst floods in years anxiously watched rescue teams search buildings yesterday, fearing the death toll from the raging torrents could rise further.

At least 44 people have died from the floods in the northern Black Sea region.

Drone footage by Reuters showed massive damage in the flood-hit Black Sea town of Bozkurt, where emergency workers were searching demolished buildings.

Thirty-six people died as a result of floods in the Kastamonu district which includes Bozkurt, and another seven people died in Sinop and one in Bartin, officials said.

In one collapsed building along the banks of the swollen river, 10 people were still believed buried. The rapid floodwaters appeared to have swept away the foundations of several other apartment blocks.

Deaths soar in Russia
819 more die in a day; Sydney lockdown extended statewide, fines hiked as Australia faces 'worst' Covid-19 episode

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday recorded its highest daily coronavirus death toll for a third day running, as the country continues to struggle with the Delta variant amid sluggish vaccination rates. A government tally showed 819 fatalities over the past 24 hours and 22,144 new cases.

The coronavirus pandemic has killed at least 4,337,725 people worldwide since the virus first emerged in late 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data.

Russia, the fourth worst-hit country in the world in terms of cases, has since mid-June been hit by a new wave of infections driven by the aggressive Delta variant.

The new figures bring Russia's total fatalities from Covid-19 to 169,683 -- the highest toll in Europe.

The figure only takes into account deaths where the virus was established as the primary cause of death after an autopsy.

Under a broader definition for deaths linked to the coronavirus, statistics agency Rosstat said that Russia has seen more than 300,000 fatalities as of the end of June.

Authorities have faced a vaccine-sceptic population, with a poll by the independent Levada Centre this week showing that 55 percent of Russians do not plan on getting inoculated.

Meanwhile, Australian police hiked fines for people breaking lockdown rules in Sydney and the rest of its home state yesterday and strict stay-at-home orders were extended statewide amid a record jump in daily new COVID-19 infections.

State police will fine up to A\$5,000

anyone breaching stay-at-home orders or for lying to contract-tracing officials, said state Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Previously breaching quarantine orders had carried a A\$1,000 fine.

"We have to accept that this is the worst situation New South Wales has been in since day one. And it's also regrettably, because of that, the worst situation Australia's been in," she told a news conference.

Locally transmitted infections surged by a record 466 over the previous 24 hours, eclipsing the previous daily high of 390 set on Friday. Four deaths were recorded yesterday, taking the state's total in the latest outbreak to 42.

It is becoming increasingly unlikely Sydney will end its nine-week lockdown on Aug. 28 as planned.

This July was world's hottest month on record

AFP, Washington

July was the hottest month globally ever recorded, a US scientific agency said Friday, in the latest data to sound the alarm about the climate crisis.

"July is typically the world's warmest month of the year, but July 2021 outdid itself as the hottest July and month ever recorded," said Rick Spinrad, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"This new record adds to the disturbing and disruptive path that climate change has set for the globe," Spinrad said in a statement citing data from the NCEI.

NOAA said combined land and ocean-surface temperature was 1.67 degrees Fahrenheit (0.93 degrees Celsius) above the 20th-century average of 60.4 degrees Fahrenheit, making it the hottest July since record-keeping began 142 years ago. The month was 0.02 degrees Fahrenheit higher than the previous record set in July 2016, which was equaled in 2019 and 2020.

Last week, a UN climate science report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provoked shock by saying the world is on course to reach 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming around 2030.

With only 1.1 degrees Celsius of warming so far, an unbroken cascade of deadly weather disasters bulked up by climate change has swept the world this summer, from asphalt-melting heatwaves in Canada, to rainstorms turning city streets in China and Germany into rivers, to untamable wildfires sweeping Greece and California.

US immigration advocates blast 'cruel' Biden policies on asylum

REUTERS, Washington

Immigration advocates criticized President Joe Biden's asylum policies on Friday, saying expulsions of migrants at the US-Mexico border and other deterrent measures were "cruel, unlawful and ineffective."

In a letter to Biden and top officials, more than 100 organizations urged the Democratic president to restore the ability of all migrants to claim asylum in the United States and eschew any new policies that limit asylum access.

Promising a more humane immigration approach, Biden has reversed many of the restrictive policies of his Republican predecessor, former President Donald

Trump. But the Democratic president has kept an order known as Title 42, one of Trump's most limiting measures which allows US authorities to expel migrants caught crossing the border back to Mexico.

Border arrests have risen to 20-year highs in recent months. Some Democrats have pressed Biden to end Title 42 and advocates for asylum seekers say the administration's actions contradict what Biden promised.

The administration says the expulsions are necessary to keep U.S. detention centers from becoming overwhelmed during the coronavirus pandemic, which they argue would create a risk for government workers, migrants and the public.



AUGUST 15

1914 - The Panama Canal opened with the passage of the vessel Ancon, although it was not formally inaugurated until July 1920.

1945 - Millions worldwide celebrated VJ (Victory in Japan) Day after Japan's surrender ended World War Two.

1947 - The Indian Independence Act came into force, setting up the two independent states of India and Pakistan.

2003 - Libya, in a letter to the UN Security Council, said it was taking responsibility for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people.

SOURCE: WEBSITES



Indigenous people take part in the celebration of the 500 anniversary of the last day of domain ahead of the fall of Tenochtitlan to the Spanish at the Zocalo square in Mexico City, on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Malaysia PM's bipartisan support call falls to deaf ears

Opposition, key ally reject his offer, ask him to resign

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's opposition parties and a key ally have rejected a plea for support from embattled Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in exchange for political and electoral reforms, urging him to resign immediately.

Muhyiddin's grip on power has been shaky since coming to office in March 2020 with a slim majority and unstable coalition. He has defied mounting calls to quit, with the pressure reaching fever pitch this month after some lawmakers in his ruling coalition withdrew support.

In a televised address on Friday, Muhyiddin acknowledged for the first time that he lacks a majority and urged opposition lawmakers to back him in a confidence vote, in a bid to shore up his government and prevent an election during a COVID-19 resurgence.

In return for their support, Muhyiddin promised to amend the constitution to limit a prime minister's period in office to two five-year terms, introduce an "anti-hopping" law to prevent elected officials from jumping parties, and ensure the

minimum voting age is immediately lowered to 18 from 21.

"This is the first time in Malaysia's history where a prime minister admits that he has lost majority support yet continues to openly solicit opposition support," the main opposition bloc Pakatan Harapan said in a statement late on Friday.

It called Muhyiddin "a prime minister without legitimacy", saying his offers were "insincere" - as the prime minister should have made them earlier, not at what they called the end of his political life.

Opposition parties and key ally United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) blasted Muhyiddin's offers, which also include increased funds for opposition lawmakers, as "bribery".

UMNO, which said Muhyiddin was obliged to resign, has regularly challenged the prime minister even after agreeing to form a government with him last year. Some UMNO lawmakers withdrew support for him this month.

"UMNO cannot consider all offers from someone who no longer has legitimacy" as prime minister, UMNO president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said in a statement.

US issues terrorism threat advisory

AFP, Washington

The US Department of Homeland Security issued a new terrorism threat advisory on Friday ahead of the anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks and amid a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic.

The National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin said the United States faces a "heightened threat environment" from both domestic terrorists "and those inspired or motivated by foreign terrorists and other malign foreign influences." It cited increased use of "online forums to influence and spread violent extremist narratives and promote violent activity."

The new advisory updated a January alert following the attack on the US Congress by supporters of then-president Donald Trump, when DHS said the country faced "increasingly complex and volatile" threats from anti-government and racially motivated extremists, often stirred up by online influence from abroad.

The bulletin had already been amended in May, with DHS warning violent extremists could exploit the easing of COVID-19 restrictions to conduct attacks.

"Extremists may seek to exploit the emergence of COVID-19 variants by viewing the potential re-establishment of public health restrictions across the United States as a rationale to conduct attacks," the DHS advisory said, adding that "pandemic-related stressors... may contribute to more violence this year."

Despite a rapid vaccination program, coronavirus case numbers have increased sharply in recent months in the United States due to the spread of the Delta variant.