

MORE NEWS

Nigerian gunmen free scores abducted from schools this year

Nigerian gunmen have freed scores of students abducted from three schools in the northwest this year, officials said Friday, following a burst of sudden releases. The mass abductions were part of a string of kidnapping for ransom attacks on Nigerian schools and colleges this year by heavily armed gangs known locally as bandits. Nearly 100 pupils abducted from an Islamic seminary in Tegina, Niger State were reunited with their families on Friday after three months in captivity. The abduction happened on May 30.

Covid: Delta doubles hospital risk vs Alpha variant

The Delta variant of the virus that causes Covid-19 doubles the risk of hospitalisation compared to the Alpha variant it has supplanted as the dominant strain worldwide, researchers reported yesterday in The Lancet. Only 1.8 percent of the more than 43,000 Covid cases assessed in comparing the two variants were in patients who had been fully vaccinated. Three-quarters were completely unvaccinated, and 24 percent had only received one jab of a two-dose vaccine. Researchers analysed healthcare data from 43,338 cases in England from March 29 to May 23 of this year. Just under 80 percent of the cases were identified as the Alpha variant, and the rest were Delta.

US parole board votes to release Robert F Kennedy's assassin

The man convicted of shooting dead Robert F Kennedy in a 1968 assassination that rocked the United States was granted parole Friday. A parole board in San Diego voted to release Sirhan Sirhan on his 16th attempt at getting out of prison. Kennedy, the younger brother of slain president John F Kennedy, was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination to follow in the family footsteps when he was gunned down in a Los Angeles hotel. His murder came just months after the killing of Black civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, and as a divided America was deep in an unpopular war in Vietnam.

US south coast braces for Hurricane Ida

Residents evacuated high-risk areas and lined up to buy supplies Friday as Louisiana braced for Hurricane Ida, expected to strengthen to an "extremely dangerous" Category 4 storm when it hits the southern United States this weekend. Louisiana has declared a state of emergency in preparation for the storm, forecast to make US landfall Sunday -- 16 years to the day after the devastating Hurricane Katrina first hit the state, which flooded 80 percent of New Orleans and killed more than 1,800 people.

Mamata's nephew Abhishek summoned in graft case

India's Enforcement Directorate has summoned Trinamool Congress lawmaker Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and his wife for questioning in a money laundering case linked to an alleged coal scam in the state, officials said yesterday. The ED summons to Abhishek and his wife drew a sharp push back from Mamata who slammed the BJP-led government at the Centre for allegedly letting loose central agencies on her nephew and claimed some BJP ministers were working hand in glove with coal mafia. Abhishek, who represents Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency and is also national general secretary of TMC, has been summoned to appear before the ED officer of the case in New Delhi on September 6 while his wife Rujira has been sent a similar summons under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for September 1.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Taliban Badri fighters, a "special forces" unit, stand guard as Afghan walk through the main entrance gate of Kabul airport to leave Afghanistan in Kabul, yesterday. Inset, Children of Afghan evacuees gives thumbs up as they play in the park along with their mother, at temporary residence compound in Doha, Qatar, on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

No quick recognition of Taliban by US or allies Says White House; US aims to prevent Afghan aid going through Taliban coffers

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday dismissed any chance of rapid recognition for a Taliban government and said it has not decided yet whether it will maintain a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan after next week's troop withdrawal.

"I want to be really clear: there's no rush to recognition of any sort by the United States or any international partners we have talked to," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

The United States has said recognition of any future Taliban regime would be contingent on it not allowing Afghan territory to be used as a base for terrorism and respect for human rights, particularly those of women.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the Taliban have asked that the United States keep a diplomatic presence in the country after the remaining US troops are pulled out on Tuesday.

"They have made very clear to us in our communication they would like to see an American diplomatic presence remain," Price said. "Ultimately, of course, it's not up to the Taliban."

"It's a determination that we will need to make consistent with the overriding prerogative and that is the safety and security of American officials," he said.

He said the Taliban have pledged to provide "safety and protection" but those are just "words" and Washington will need further assurances before making any decision.

After the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15, the remaining diplomats from the US embassy fled to the US-secured airport in the capital.

The United States has been in close contact with its former enemy as it tries to complete the risky operation of evacuating tens of thousands of



people from Afghanistan at the end of a 20-year war. Meanwhile, the United States will continue to be a "very generous" donor of humanitarian aid to the Afghan people and will aim to prevent any of its assistance from passing through Taliban coffers, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

The United States is taking steps to allow humanitarian work to continue in Afghanistan despite US sanctions on the Taliban, which seized power 11 days ago in a war-torn country with an unfolding humanitarian crisis.

"We can maintain a humanitarian commitment to ... the Afghan people in ways that do not have any funding or assistance pass through the coffers of a central government," Price told reporters. "I expect the United States will continue to be a very generous donor to the Afghan people."

The United Nations says more than 18 million people - over half of Afghanistan's population - require aid and half of all Afghan children under the age of five already suffer from acute malnutrition.

The Taliban have said they will respect human rights and will not allow terrorists to operate from the country. The group has also encouraged aid organizations to continue their work, saying aid was welcome as long as it was not used as a means of political influence over Afghanistan.

Where is the Taliban's supreme leader?

AFP, Kabul

In the days since taking power in Afghanistan, a wide range of Taliban figures have entered Kabul -- hardened commandos, armed madrassa students and greying leaders back from years of exile.

There has been one major exception -- the group's supreme leader.

Hibatullah Akhundzada -- the so-called commander of the faithful -- has shepherded the Taliban as its chief since 2016 when snatched from relative obscurity to oversee a movement in crisis.

After taking the insurgency's reins, the cleric was tasked with the mammoth challenge of unifying a jihadist movement that briefly fractured during a bitter power struggle.

The infighting came as the group was hit with successive blows -- the assassination of Akhundzada's predecessor and the revelation that its leaders had hidden the death of Taliban founder Mullah Omar.

Little is still known about Akhundzada's day-to-day role, with his public profile largely limited to the release of annual messages during Islamic holidays.

Apart from a single photograph released by the Taliban, the leader has never made a public appearance and his whereabouts remain largely unknown.

Since taking control of Kabul in mid-August, the group has remained tight-lipped about Akhundzada's movements. "You will see him soon, God willing," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told reporters this week when asked about

Akhundzada's whereabouts.

The ongoing silence comes as the heads of various Taliban factions have openly preached in Kabul's mosques, met with opposition figures, and even chatted with Afghan cricket officials in recent days.

The Taliban have a long history of keeping their top leader in the shadows.

The group's enigmatic founder Mullah Mohammad Omar was notorious for his hermit ways and rarely travelled to Kabul when the group was in power in the 1990s. Instead, Omar stayed largely out of sight in his compound in Kandahar, reluctant even to meet visiting delegations.

Still, his word was rule and no singular figure has emerged to command the movement with the same respect.

Laurel Miller -- the head of the Asia programme at the International Crisis Group -- said Akhundzada "appears to have adopted a reclusive style similar" to that of Omar.

The secrecy might also be fuelled by security reasons, Miller added, citing the assassination of his predecessor Mullah Akhtar Mansour by a US drone strike.

Any power vacuum would risk destabilising a movement that has managed to stay cohesive following decades of conflict, tens of thousands of foot soldiers killed, and top leaders assassinated or shipped off to the US prison in Guantanamo Bay.

Others suggest the group may just be biding its time until US-led forces make their final exit from Afghanistan in the coming days.



Members of Guardia di Finanza (Finance police) get on board around 15 migrants from a wooden boat close to the Italian island of Lampedusa, in the Mediterranean Sea, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Researchers discover world's 'northernmost' island

AFP, Copenhagen

Scientists have discovered what is believed to be the world's northernmost landmass -- a yet-to-be-named island north of Greenland that could soon be swallowed up by seawaters.

Researchers came upon the landmass on an expedition in July, and initially thought they had reached Oodaaq, up until now the northernmost island on the planet.

"We were informed that there had been an error on my GPS which had led us to believe that we were standing on Oodaaq Island," said the head of the mission, Morten Rasch from

Copenhagen University's department of geosciences and natural resource management.

"In reality, we had discovered a new island further north, a discovery that just slightly expands the kingdom" of Denmark, he added.

Oodaaq is some 700 kilometres (435 miles) south of the North Pole, while the new island is 780 metres (2,560 feet) north of Oodaaq.

Copenhagen University said in a statement late Friday the "yet-to-be-named island is... the northernmost point of Greenland and one of the most northerly points of land on Earth."

But it is only 30 to 60 metres above sea level, and Rasch said it could be a

"short-lived islet".

"No one knows how long it will remain. In principle, it could disappear as soon as a powerful new storm hits."

The autonomous Danish territory of Greenland has grabbed headlines in recent years, most notably in 2019 when former US president Donald Trump said he wanted to buy the Arctic territory.

The proposal, described as "absurd" by the Danish government, caused a diplomatic kerfuffle, but also signalled renewed American interest in the region.

It has also been hard hit by climate change as warmer temperatures have melted its glaciers, causing alarming sea level rise.

Advertisement for Stanchard Bank Limited featuring a portrait of a man and text in Bengali: 'অভিনন্দনে! সফলতার সারথি'. It mentions the appointment of Mr. Akram Uddin Ahmad as Ambassador of Good Will and lists several awards and honors.