

MORE NEWS

Singapore now the most vaccinated country against Covid

Singapore has fully inoculated 80 percent of its 5.7 million people against COVID-19, according to officials, becoming the world's most vaccinated country and setting the stage for further easing of curbs. "We have crossed another milestone, where 80% of our population has received their full regimen of two doses," Singapore's Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in a Facebook post yesterday. That gives the tiny city-state the world's highest rate of complete vaccinations, according to a tracker by the Reuters news agency. Other countries that have high vaccination rates include the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Chile, which have fully inoculated more than 70 percent of their populations.

Hurricane Ida grows to Category 4 storm

Hurricane Ida was upgraded to a Category 4 storm as it stayed on course to hit New Orleans with maximum sustained winds reaching 225 kilometers per hour, the US National Hurricane Center said yesterday. Ida was due to make landfall later yesterday, 16 years to the day Hurricane Katrina devastated the southern US city, flooding 80 percent of New Orleans, and leaving behind 1,800 casualties and billions of dollars in damage. Shops were boarded up and evacuations were underway Saturday, with officials warning residents to leave immediately or hunker down to ride out the storm.

Japan detects more Moderna vaccine contamination

Two Japanese regions yesterday suspended use of some Moderna Covid-19 shots after more cases of contamination were spotted, the local governments said. The move came a day after the Japanese health ministry said it was investigating the death of two men who received doses from other tainted Moderna batches — though the cause of death is unknown. Okinawa prefecture said it had suspended use of Moderna shots at a major vaccination centre in the city of Naha, while Gunma prefecture, north of Tokyo, also said it had paused use of contaminated lots. The contamination in Okinawa and Gunma follows the suspension of 1.63 million doses across Japan on Thursday after the deaths of two men aged 30 and 38 in August following their second Moderna doses.

Israel strikes Gaza after fire balloons, border clashes

The Israeli air force attacked two Hamas sites in Gaza yesterday, the army said, after Gazans clashed with forces on the border and launched incendiary balloons into southern Israel. The latest escalation came as Israel and Egypt continued to relax restrictions on commerce and travel imposed on the Gaza Strip, largely cut off by both countries since the Islamist movement Hamas seized the Palestinian enclave in 2007. There were no reports from the Gaza Strip of any casualties caused by the Israeli strikes. Hamas and Israel then fought a devastating 11-day conflict in May, the worst between the two sides in years, which ended with an informal truce.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A protester gestures to riot police standing beside water cannon trucks during a demonstration calling for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over the government's handling of the Covid-19 coronavirus crisis in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday

PHOTO: AFP

France, UK to push for Kabul safe zone

Says Macron ahead of today's UN meet, slams US for shifting focus and for abandoning allies

AGENCIES

France and Britain will submit a resolution to an emergency United Nations meeting due today proposing a safe zone in Kabul to try and protect people trying to leave Afghanistan, French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday.

"Our resolution proposal aims to define a safe zone in Kabul, under UN control, which would allow humanitarian operations to continue," Macron told French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche (JDD) in an interview.

"What we are trying to do is to be able to organise targeted humanitarian operations for evacuations that will not take place through the military airport in Kabul," he said.

"It is about protecting these threatened Afghans and getting them out of the country in the coming days or weeks. We will see if this can be done through the capital's civilian airport or through neighbouring countries."

He said such a deal would be a prerequisite for constructing a future western relationship with the Taliban.

Journal du Dimanche cited Macron as saying the UK backed the resolution, although London has not spoken publicly on any such efforts. A Whitehall source played down the French president's comments, saying the plans outlined in the interview were



French President Emmanuel Macron visits the Grand al-Nuri Mosque in the Old City of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday

PHOTO: REUTERS

"premature".

"We are not there yet," the source said.

It is not yet clear if Russia or China will accept the resolution, or see it as an incursion into Afghan sovereignty.

Turkey had been negotiating with the Taliban and the US to take military responsibility for the airport, but abandoned the plan after the Taliban said they would not accept Turkish troops remaining on its soil.

Macron made no attempt to hide

that the evacuation operation was incomplete. "We still have on our lists several thousand Afghans who we want to protect, who are at risk because of their commitments - magistrates, artists, intellectuals - but also many other people who have been reported by relatives and who we are told are at risk," he said.

The French president made a succession of pointed remarks towards the US, pointing out that Joe Biden had yet to accept many refugees from

Afghanistan on to American soil but was instead sending them to processing centres in countries as far afield as Uganda and Albania.

France, he said, "had fought for the last few years to avoid too brutal a disengagement of the Americans or other allies in the region", adding that the withdrawal from Afghanistan could have a negative impact on Iraq and Syria.

"The risk now, as we have seen in Afghanistan, is that the impression is given that they are abandoning when their agenda changes. This is not our case. France does not abandon those who fought alongside it".

He added that the US had shifted its "strategic agenda" to the Asia-Pacific region because American middle-class voters do "not understand why [Washington] sends soldiers for years to die at the end of the world".

He concluded: "We must therefore play our part more in the face of the destabilisation of our neighbourhood."

On a visit to Mosul in Iraq, Macron later confirmed the safe zone comments and said he was hopeful the resolution would be welcomed favourably.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is convening a meeting on Afghanistan with the UN envoys for Britain, France, the United States, China and Russia - the Security Council's permanent, veto-wielding members.

Quotes of the day



"The risk now, as we have seen in Afghanistan, is that the impression is given that the west has conditional allies that they are abandoning when their agenda changes. This is not our case. France does not abandon those who fought alongside it."

FRENCH PRESIDENT EMANUEL MACRON AHEAD OF A KEY UNSC MEET CALLED BY UN CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES TO CONTROL THE FALLOUT FROM THE WEST'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN

TALIBAN TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN

A 'blow' to Indian interests

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

The Taliban's return to power two weeks ago has caused a major diplomatic setback for India, with the South Asian giant now one of the region's "most disadvantaged" players, analysts say.

The sudden collapse of the Western-backed government in Kabul on August 15 precipitated an unprecedented exodus of diplomats, foreign aid workers and Afghans who worked for Western countries and feared reprisals from the Taliban.

India was among the nations that closed their missions in Afghanistan and brought back their staff and citizens. It is still trying to evacuate some citizens left behind amid chaotic conditions at the Kabul airport.

New Delhi invested \$3b in development projects, offered scholarships to Afghan students, and helped construct the parliament building at a cost of \$90m, earning huge goodwill in the country of 38 million.

Last year, during the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said no part of Afghanistan was "untouched" by the "400-plus projects" that India had undertaken in all 34 provinces of the country.

Bilateral trade between the two countries had also increased significantly over the years and reached \$1.5bn in 2019-2020.

India, which sees the Taliban as a proxy of its archrival Pakistan, had maintained close ties with

the Northern Alliance, which defeated the Afghan armed group in 2001 with the help of the US-led Nato forces.

"India has gone from being Kabul's closest regional partner to one of the region's most disadvantaged players in an Afghanistan context," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia programme at the US-based Wilson Center.

Echoing similar sentiments, Happyymon Jacob from New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, said: "I think India seems to be out of the game in Afghanistan."

Some foreign policy mandarins have pointed out India was too late in reaching out to the Taliban to secure its interests, as reports emerged that Indian officials met the Taliban in the Qatari capital, Doha, in June. The Taliban established a political office in Doha in 2013.

Kugelman said two factors went against New Delhi: "India's reluctance to reach out to the Taliban until it was too late, and an ill-fated Afghan reconciliation process with a deep Pakistani footprint, owing to its ties to the Taliban."

"One deprived India of potential leverage, and the other put New Delhi at a geopolitical disadvantage," Kugelman told Al Jazeera.

"Afghanistan will now have a pro-Pakistan government, and this will give Pakistan and India's other key rival, China - Pakistan's close friend - an opportunity to play more of a role in Afghanistan," said Kugelman

Rebel attack on Yemen biggest airbase kills 30

AFP, Dubai

Strikes on Yemen's largest airbase yesterday killed at least 30 pro-government troops and wounded at least 56 more, said medical and loyalist sources who blamed Iran-backed Huthi rebels for the attack.

The strikes were carried out on Al-Anad airbase, some 60 kilometres north of Yemen's second city Aden in the south of the conflict-riven country.

The airbase served as the headquarters for US troops overseeing a long-running drone war against al-Qaeda until they pulled out in March 2015, shortly before the Huthis overran the area.

An armed forces spokesman accused Yemen's Shia Huthi rebels of carrying out missile and drone strikes on the facility.



'Asleep on watch' UK gov slammed over Afghan exit as hundreds left behind

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson defended Britain's airlift from Kabul yesterday following growing criticism that ministers had been "asleep on watch", potentially leaving thousands of eligible Afghans behind in the country.

Britain, like the United States, has been criticised for failing to predict how quickly the Afghan government would fall, meaning it had not made sufficient preparation for the chaos that would follow when the Taliban seized power.

Britain's last military flight left Kabul late yesterday, ending a chaotic two weeks in which soldiers helped to evacuate more than 15,000 people from the crowds who descended on the capital's airport, desperate to flee the country.

Richard Dannatt, former chief of staff of the British army, said the government now needed an inquiry to establish why it had been so ill-prepared for the rapid turn of events. "It is unfathomable why it would appear that the government was asleep on watch," he told Times Radio. "We've had this chaotic extraction, we should have done better, we could have done better."

The Observer newspaper said thousands of emails sent to the Foreign Office by lawmakers and charities, detailing cases of Afghan citizens who needed help to leave, had not been read.

A Foreign Office spokesperson said it had worked tirelessly to evacuate people but it had always cautioned that it would not be able to help everyone.

Britain's defence minister, Ben Wallace, predicted last week that time had run out to evacuate around 1,000 Afghans who were eligible to come to Britain, including former staff to the UK.

Johnson said however that while Britain would not have wished to leave Afghanistan in the way it did, the armed forces should still be proud of their achievements.

Speaking to the 150,000 men and women who completed a tour of Afghanistan, and the families of the 457 who died there, Johnson said they had succeeded in keeping Britain safe and in improving the livelihoods for Afghan locals.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

AUGUST 25

1918 - Vladimir Lenin, leader of Soviet Russia, was shot and wounded by Fanya Kaplan after speaking at a factory in Moscow.

1963 - Hotline established between Washington and Moscow. John F Kennedy becomes the first US president to have a direct phone line to the Kremlin in Moscow.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

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GD-1588

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SPECIAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON ENERGY AND POWER RELATED APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECTS
(10th Program Solicitation)

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Research Focus Areas
Proposers willing to submit applied research proposals should address one of the following key research areas:

1. Responsible Energy Conservation
2. Energy Efficiency and Demand Management
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For any queries, Please contact:
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Email: farhuseng@gmail.com

GD-1542