

Grant access or face action

US warns Iran as IAEA inspectors blocked from nuclear site

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran must stop denying the IAEA nuclear watchdog access to a workshop making centrifuge parts as agreed two weeks ago or face diplomatic retaliation at the agency's Board of Governors within days, the United States said yesterday.

The workshop at the TESA Karaj complex makes components for centrifuges, machines that enrich uranium, and was hit by apparent sabotage in June in which one of four International Atomic Energy Agency cameras there was destroyed. Iran removed them and the destroyed camera's footage is missing.

TESA Karaj was one of several sites to which Iran agreed to grant IAEA inspectors access to service IAEA monitoring equipment and replace memory cards just as they were due to fill up with data such as camera footage. The September 12 accord helped avoid a diplomatic escalation between Iran and the West.

"We are deeply troubled by Iran's refusal to provide the IAEA with the needed access to service its monitoring equipment..." a US statement yesterday said. Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Kazem Gharibabadi, said that before the deal, Iran indicated that monitoring equipment at Karaj was "not included for servicing" because of ongoing investigations and Sunday's report "goes beyond the agreed terms of the JS (Joint Statement)".



Members of the Communist Party of India (CPI) protest against farm laws during a nationwide strike, in Mumbai, India yesterday. Indian farmers opposed to reforms they say threaten their livelihoods aim to renew their push against the changes by holding nationwide protests a year after laws on the liberalisation of the sector were introduced. PHOTO: REUTERS

CLASHES WITH ANTI-COUP DISSIDENTS IN MYANMAR

Military launches air strikes

REUTERS

Myanmar's military launched air strikes at the weekend after clashes with fighters opposed to the junta in the Sagaing region, according to media and a militia member, as phone lines and the internet were also severed in some districts.

The Southeast Asian country has been in crisis since the army seized power on February 1, ending a decade of tentative steps towards democracy and triggering outrage at home and abroad and the setting up of People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to take on the military.

The DVB news portal reported the air strikes occurred as the army staged an offensive in the Pinlebu area of Sagaing in northwest Myanmar, citing residents who heard aircraft and explosions on Saturday night before phone lines and the internet went down.

A member of the Pinlebu PDF, speaking from outside the area, also confirmed by telephone that air strikes had taken place, but said there had been no casualties amongst his group.

"We cannot contact them due

to the internet and phone lines blackout," the activist, who declined to be identified, said of his opposition colleagues.

Reuters could not independently verify any of the claims and a spokesman for the military did not answer calls seeking comment.

- Phone lines, internet severed in some districts in northwest
- NUG says more than 25 govt soldiers killed
- Arms cache including rocket propelled grenade seized in fighting

The National Unity Government (NUG), a shadow administration set up by ousted lawmakers and others opposed to the junta, said an arms cache including a rocket propelled grenade, small arms and shells had been seized in the fighting. It said more than 25 government soldiers had been killed.

There has been an upsurge in bloodshed in areas like Sagaing after the underground NUG declared an

uprising on September 7 and called on PDFs to target the junta and its assets.

Earlier in the conflict, the military had at times shut down the internet, particularly in cities, in a bid to curb demonstrations.

Since Thursday, the military had cut internet access in 11 conflict-hit districts in Chin State and in the Magway region, the Myanmar Now news portal reported, citing residents and members of PDFs.

Last week, thousands fled from the town of Thantlang in Chin State, bordering India, after fighting in which a Christian pastor among those killed.

Some militia groups have also claimed responsibility for blowing up scores of telecommunication towers run by Mytel, a partly army-controlled company.

US-based democracy watchdog Freedom House said in a report published last week that internet freedom slumped by 14 points in Myanmar - the largest annual decline ever recorded on its 100-point scale - after the coup.

Covid cuts life expectancy by most since WW2: study

REUTERS, London

The Covid-19 pandemic reduced life expectancy in 2020 by the largest amount since World War Two, according to a study published yesterday by Oxford University, with the life expectancy of American men dropping by more than two years.

Data from most of the 29 countries - spanning most of Europe, the US and Chile - that were analysed by scientists recorded reductions in life expectancy last year and at a scale that wiped out years of progress.

Life expectancy fell by more than six months compared with 2019 in 22 of the 29 countries analysed in the study.

The university said most life expectancy reductions across different countries could be linked to official Covid-19 deaths. There have been nearly 5 million reported deaths caused by the new coronavirus so far, a Reuters tally shows.

"The fact that our results highlight such a large impact that is directly attributable to Covid-19 shows how devastating a shock it has been for many countries," said Dr Ridhi Kashyap, co-lead author of the paper, published in the International Journal of Epidemiology.

There were greater drops in life expectancy for men than women in most countries, with the largest decline in American men, who saw life expectancy drop by 2.2 years relative to 2019.

Overall, men had more than a year shaved off in 15 countries, compared to women in 11 countries. That wiped out the progress on mortality that had been made in the previous 5.6 years.

In the United States, the rise in mortality was mainly among those of working age and those under 60, while in Europe, deaths among people aged over 60 contributed more significantly to the increase in mortality.

Kashyap appealed to more countries, including low- and middle-income nations, to make mortality data available for further studies.

World's crisis manager steps down

German Chancellor Angela Merkel endured as others came and went over the past 15 years

CNN ONLINE

It's a lesson many politicians -- mostly male -- have learned the hard way over the past 15 years: never underestimate Angela Merkel.

The German Chancellor is preparing to step down later this year, having long ago cemented her position as one of the world's most successful political leaders.

In her time in office, she has dealt with five UK prime ministers, four French presidents and seven Italian prime ministers. When President-elect Joe Biden takes office on Wednesday, he'll be the fourth American commander-in-chief she's worked with.

Yet despite her track record, Merkel, the leader of the world's fourth-biggest economy, has spent much of her political career having to prove herself.

Her counterparts have tried to overpower or even humiliate her. Vladimir Putin once brought a Labrador dog into his meeting with



the Chancellor who is famously afraid of dogs. Donald Trump told her she was stupid. Silvio Berlusconi once left her waiting for 15 minutes while he chatted on the phone.

When she became the first woman to take Germany's top job in 2005, many deemed her too inexperienced and uncharismatic to last.

Bild, Germany's most-read newspaper, marked the occasion with a front-page photo and a headline reading "Miss Germany!" Even within her own party, she was referred to as "das Mädchen," German for "the girl."

But while other leaders have

come and gone over the intervening years, Merkel has endured, enjoying an unparalleled popularity. "Das Mädchen" became nicknamed "die Mutti," a mother figure and symbol of stability.

Political scientist Joyce Mushaben, said Merkel was seen as a "temporary" leader when she first rose through the ranks of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party.

Mushaben, a Merkel biographer and professor of University of Missouri-St. Louis, said the key to Merkel's success lay in the unique mix of her background and her abilities.

Her experience of growing up as a pastor's daughter in Communist East Germany has deeply influenced her political decision-making, and as a former scientist with a doctorate in quantum chemistry, she often approaches problems in the same way as complex calculations, Mushaben said.

'Convenient scapegoat'

PM Imran Khan says Pakistan should not be blamed for Afghan war's outcome

DAWN ONLINE

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that Pakistan must not be blamed for the outcome of the war in Afghanistan and for the losses of the United States, stressing on setting eyes on the future to avoid another conflict instead of continuing with a blame game.

"Today, with Afghanistan at another crossroads, we must look to the future to prevent another violent conflict in that country rather than perpetuating the blame game of the past," he wrote in an op-ed for The Washington Post today.

The premier emphasised that Pakistan "surely" could not be blamed for the fact that "300,000-plus well-trained and equipped Afghan security forces saw no reason to fight the lightly armed Taliban".

The underlying problem, he said, was an Afghan government structure lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the average Afghan.



He also expressed "surprise" over the recent Congressional hearings on Afghanistan, where "no mention was made of Pakistan's sacrifices as a US ally in the war on terror for over two decades".

"Instead, we were blamed for America's loss," he added.

Prime Minister Imran recalled that since 2001, he had repeatedly warned that the Afghan war was "unwinnable" and pointed out that given their history, the Afghans would never accept a protracted foreign military presence.

Even an outsider including Pakistan could not change this reality, he said.

"Tragically, instead of facing this reality, the Afghan and Western governments created a convenient scapegoat by blaming Pakistan, wrongly accusing us of providing safe havens to the Taliban and allowing their free movement across our border," the prime minister said.



SEPTEMBER 28

1939 - Warsaw, Poland surrenders to Germans after weeks of resistance.

1994 - In Europe's worst peacetime maritime disaster, 852 people drowned when the ferry Estonia sank about 20 miles from the Finnish island of Utoe, en route from Tallinn to Stockholm.

1995 - Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat signed an accord at White House ceremonies establishing Palestinian self-rule in most of the West Bank.

SOURCE: REUTERS

MORE NEWS

S Korea's President Moon raises dog meat ban

South Korea's President Moon Jae-in raised banning the eating of dogs in the country yesterday, his office said, a traditional practice that is becoming an international embarrassment. The meat has long been a part of South Korean cuisine with about one million dogs believed to be eaten annually, but consumption has declined as more people embrace dogs as companions rather than livestock. The practice is now something of a taboo among younger generations and pressure from animal rights activists has also been mounting. "Hasn't the time come to prudently consider prohibiting dog meat consumption?" Moon told Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum during a weekly meeting, according to the presidential spokeswoman.

Encrypted messaging app Signal hit by brief outage

Encrypted instant messaging app Signal was hit by a brief outage late Sunday that interrupted services on the platform at the same time as localised interruptions on other social media services. Signal blamed hosting issues for the disruption, which internet outage monitor DownDetector said began at 11:05 pm Eastern Standard Time (0305 GMT), citing user reports. The site logged reports of interrupted service in the United States, Europe, Hong Kong and other parts of the world. Service had largely returned to normal by 3:00 am (0700 GMT), according to Signal's developers.



India exam cheats caught with Bluetooth flip-flops

Ten people have been arrested in India for planning to cheat in fiercely competitive teaching exams using Bluetooth devices concealed in their flip-flops, police said. Cribbing has long been a problem in India and, for Sunday's government exams in Rajasthan state, police had permission to snap mobile internet access while the tests lasted. But one group planned to get around this with devices hidden in the soles of their flip-flops that could receive ordinary calls which would be transmitted wirelessly to tiny receivers hidden in their ears. The plan was for accomplices outside to call the hidden contraptions and dictate the correct answers to the exams. But the group of would-be teachers were arrested acting suspiciously outside the examination hall before the exams and the devices in their footwear were discovered.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS