

## Quote of the day



“It has been an incident, it has been some misunderstanding, it has been a lack of communication. That’s it, that’s over. Let’s move forward.”

EU FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF **JOSEP BORRELL**, AFTER TALKING WITH US SECRETARY OF DEFENCE ANTHONY BLINKEN IN WASHINGTON, SAYS ON FRANCE-UNITED STATES DISPUTE OVER SCRAPPING A MASSIVE SUBMARINE CONTRACT



(From left) Chief Constable of Essex Police BJ Harrington, Britain’s Labour Party leader Keir Starmer, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Speaker of the House Sir Lindsay Hoyle and Home Secretary Priti Patel hold flowers as they arrive at the scene where British MP David Amess was stabbed to death during a meeting with constituents at the Belfairs Methodist Church, in Leigh-on-Sea, Britain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## MORE NEWS

## Russia tops 1,000 daily Covid deaths for first time

Russia yesterday topped 1,000 deaths over 24 hours for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, with the country’s job drive at a standstill and few restrictions in place. An official government tally showed 1,002 deaths and 33,208 new infections, setting a high for both fatalities and cases for the third day in a row. The surging outbreak has come with just 31 percent of Russians fully inoculated as of yesterday, according to the Gogov website, which tallies Covid-19 data from the regions. A lack of tough restrictions has allowed the virus to spread unchecked, though a number of regions have re-introduced QR codes for access to public places. Russia’s fatalities from Covid now stand at 222,315 -- the highest toll in Europe.

## WTO again fails to agree on Covid vaccine patent waiver

The World Trade Organization said Friday its member nations had again failed to agree to suspend intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines, with some countries doubting a deal could be reached unless certain delegations make “real compromises”. South Africa and India have called for intellectual property rights to be temporarily lifted for coronavirus vaccines during the pandemic in order to boost production and address the gaping inequality in access between rich and poor nations. However the idea has met with fierce opposition from pharmaceutical giants and their host countries, which insist patents are not the main roadblocks to scaling up production and warn the move could hamper innovation.

## Incident ‘a terrorist incident’

AFP, Leigh-on-Sea

The fatal stabbing of British lawmaker David Amess was a terrorist incident, police said yesterday, as MPs pressed for tougher security in the wake of the second killing of a UK politician while meeting constituents in just over five years.

Veteran Conservative MP David Amess, 69, was talking with voters at a church in the small town of Leigh-on-Sea east of London when he was stabbed to death on Friday.

Police said they arrested a 25-year-old suspect and were investigating “a potential motivation linked to Islamist extremism”.

Police have said the investigation is in the “very early stages”, though multiple UK media outlets, citing sources, reported that the suspect was believed to be a British national with Somali heritage.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited the scene to pay his respects yesterday, laying floral wreaths outside the church with the leader

of the opposition, Labour leader Keir Starmer in a rare show of unity, along with the Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle and Home Secretary Priti Patel.

Members of the public also came to lay bouquets next to the police tape surrounding the crime scene.

Britain’s politicians were stunned by the highly public attack, which

## MURDER OF UK MP

recalled the murder of a pro-EU lawmaker ahead of the Brexit referendum.

In June 2016, Labour MP Jo Cox was killed by a far-right extremist, prompting demands for action against what lawmakers said was “a rising tide” of public abuse and threats against elected representatives.

Home Secretary Patel on Friday ordered police across the country to review security arrangements for all 650 MPs.

House of Commons Speaker Hoyle promised no “knee-jerk reactions” but told Sky News: “We will take further measures if we need to”.

MPs and their staff have been attacked before, although it is rare.

But their safety was thrown into sharp focus by Brexit, which stoked deep political divisions and has led to often angry, partisan rhetoric.

Cox’s killer repeatedly shouted “Britain first” before shooting and stabbing the 41-year-old MP outside her constituency meeting near Leeds, northern England.

A specialist police unit set up to investigate threats against MPs in the aftermath said 678 crimes against lawmakers were reported between 2016 and 2020.

Most (582) were for malicious communications, although other crimes included harassment (46), terrorism (nine), threats (seven), and common assault (three).

Separate figures indicated a sharp rise in reports since 2018, including three threats to kill.

## Iran not ready to resume Vienna talks

Plans Brussels meeting first

REUTERS, Brussels/Paris

Iran is not ready to return to talks with world powers over its nuclear programme yet and its new negotiating team wants to first meet with the EU in Brussels in the next few weeks, a senior EU official has said.

On Thursday, Iran’s foreign ministry said it would hold talks in the coming days with the EU in Brussels.

EU political director Enrique Mora, the chief coordinator for the talks, was in Tehran on Thursday to meet members of Iran’s nuclear negotiating team, four months after discussions broke off between Iran and world powers.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has so far refused to resume indirect talks with the United States in Vienna on both sides returning to compliance with the deal, under which Iran curbed its nuclear program in return for economic sanctions relief.

Diplomats from France, Britain and Germany, who are party to the accord along with China and Russia, said ahead of Mora’s visit that it came at a critical time and things could not be deemed “business as usual” given escalating Iranian nuclear activities and the stalling of negotiations.

The United States said time was running short. “They are not yet ready for engaging in Vienna,” the official told reporters on condition of anonymity. Describing a meeting in Brussels as a “good idea”, the official said it would give both sides the opportunity to go through the texts on the table from June and clarify questions that Iran’s new negotiating team may have.



## IS claims Kandahar suicide attack that killed at least 60

The Islamic State group yesterday claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on a Shia mosque in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar that killed at least 60 people and injured scores more. The Friday assault came just a week after another IS-claimed attack on Shiite worshippers at a mosque in the northern city of Kunduz that killed more than 60 people. In a statement released on its Telegram channels, the jihadist group said two Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) suicide bombers carried out separate attacks on different parts of the mosque in Kandahar -- the spiritual heartland of the Taliban -- while worshippers prayed inside. The group, a bitter rival of fellow Sunni Islamist movement the Taliban, which swept back to power in Afghanistan in August as the United States and its allies withdrew, regards Shia Muslims as heretics.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



OCTOBER 17

**1973** - The Arab-dominated Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) announces a decision to cut oil exports to the United States and other nations that provided military aid to Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

**1989** - The 103-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species approved a worldwide ban on ivory trading.

**2009** - Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed holds first underwater cabinet meeting in bid to raise awareness over rising sea levels due to climate change.

SOURCE: REUTERS

## Rahul hints at running for Congress chief again

Election to be held next year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In the backdrop of repeated calls by dissident senior party leaders for an organisational overhaul, India’s main opposition party Congress yesterday announced it would have election for a president between August 21 and September 20 next year as Rahul Gandhi reportedly said he would consider returning as party head.

Rahul quit as Congress president in May, 2019 soon after the party’s dismal show in national elections that saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party return to power for a second successive tenure.

Rahul’s mother Sonia Gandhi became the interim president in August as the younger Gandhi steadfastly refused to reconsider his decision to step down.

Senior Congress leader Ambika Soni was quoted by ANI as saying that all leaders at yesterday’s CWC meeting wanted Rahul to become party president again.

Rahul is reported to have said that he would “consider,” ANI reported citing CWC sources.



It is up to Rahul Gandhi to decide whether or not to become Congress president again, Soni said.

The timeline for the election of the party president was approved at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, the party’s top decision-making forum, in New Delhi.

The election for the post of Congress president would be preceded by election of presidents and other office-bearers of the party’s units in different states in July-August next year, party spokesman K C Venugopal told the media after the CWC meeting.

Earlier, speaking at the CWC meeting, Sonia Gandhi hit out at dissident senior leaders of the party who have been critical of the Gandhi family and pushing for an organisational overhaul and the election of “visible and effective leadership”.

“Above all, it requires self-control and discipline. I am acutely conscious of the fact I have been interim Congress President ever since the CWC asked me to return in this capacity in 2019,” she said, pointing out internal elections had been scheduled for June this year before Covid struck.



A man is seen among damaged temple after a 4.8 magnitude earthquake struck northeast of Bali, in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, yesterday. The earthquake killed at least three people.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## India fears Taliban fallout in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi set out his Taliban worries to world leaders this week, Indian forces staged raids and battled Kashmir militants who he fears could be emboldened by the Islamists’ victory in Afghanistan.

Kashmir rebel shootings of civilians and police, raids by the security forces on militant hideouts, and insurgent infiltrations across the India-Pakistan ceasefire line have all increased in the Muslim-majority region since the Taliban overran Kabul on August 15.

About 40 people have been killed in shootings and clashes in the two months since then in the Himalayan region, which has been divided since India and Pakistan became independent in 1947.

Militants have targeted minority Hindu and Sikh civilians, while gun battles near the ceasefire line have also left soldiers and rebels dead.

India has not openly blamed the Taliban takeover for the uptick in violence, but it has intensified patrols near Pakistani Kashmir and fortified some army camps, according to residents and security officials who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.



Modi told a G20 summit in Rome earlier this week that international efforts were needed to make sure Afghanistan does not become a safe haven for “radicalisation and terrorism”.

He has also raised India’s concerns with US President Joe Biden.

In September, he told the UN General Assembly that no country must be allowed to use Afghanistan “as a tool for its own selfish interests” -- a comment widely seen as a reference to neighbouring Pakistan, the chief backer of the Taliban’s 1996-2001 regime.

This time, Islamabad has stopped short of

recognising the new Taliban government.

Still, New Delhi accuses its arch-rival in Islamabad of fuelling Pakistan-based militant groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which are blamed for many attacks in Kashmir.

Pakistan denies the claim. India was a backer of the Soviet-puppet government in Kabul that was overthrown by mujahideen forces in 1992.

In 2001 it helped the US-led forces that toppled the Taliban. And it was a major donor to the government that the hardline Islamists crushed in August.

Afghan militants fought alongside Kashmir fighters in the 1980s and 1990s. About 20 Afghan “guest mujahideen” were killed and 10 were captured, according to a former Kashmiri fighter.

India worries that weapons and fighters could again reach the region, over which it has fought two wars against Pakistan.

Protests are virtually impossible in Kashmir.

But some in Kashmir have quietly welcomed the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan as a victory against the odds that they too can aspire to one day.

## Chinese astronauts arrive at space station for longest mission

AFP, Beijing

Three astronauts successfully docked with China’s new space station yesterday on what is set to be Beijing’s longest crewed mission to date and the latest landmark in its drive to become a major space power.

The three blasted off shortly after midnight from the Jiuquan launch centre in northwestern China’s Gobi desert, the China Manned Space Agency said, with the team expected to spend six months at the Tiangong space station. The space agency declared the launch a success and said the crew “were in good shape”.

The Shenzhou-13 vessel carrying the three completed its docking with the radial port of the space station less than seven hours after the launch.

The mission, which is expected to last twice as long as a previous 90-day visit, will involve the crew setting up equipment and testing technology for future construction on the Tiangong station.

Mission commander Zhai Zhigang, 55, a former fighter pilot who performed the country’s first spacewalk in 2008, said the team would undertake “more complex” spacewalks than during previous missions.

The crew include military pilot Wang Yaping, 41, who is the first woman to visit the space station after becoming China’s second woman in space in 2013.

The other team member is People’s Liberation Army pilot Ye Guangfu, 41.

A previous record-breaking crew -- making the first mission to Tiangong -- returned to Earth in September after spending three months on the space station.

China’s heavily promoted space programme has already seen the nation land a rover on Mars and send probes to the moon.

Tiangong, meaning “heavenly palace”, is expected to operate for at least 10 years. Its core module entered orbit earlier this year, with the station expected to be operational by 2022.