

Quote of the day



“The carbon pollution of a handful of countries has brought humanity to its knees and they bear the greatest responsibility. I hope we are still on time to avoid a failure in Glasgow, but time is running short, and things are getting more difficult and that is why I'm very worried. I'm afraid things might get wrong.”

UN CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES EXPRESSES HIS DOUBT AHEAD OF KEY COP26 CLIMATE SUMMIT



People enjoy a meal at a cafe in Melbourne yesterday. Melbourne reopened yesterday after enduring one of the world's most prolonged series of lockdowns, with relieved residents toasting their freedom in bars and restaurants or queueing for desperately needed haircuts. The five million people living in Australia's second-biggest city have spent more than 260 days under lockdown since the beginning of the pandemic.

PHOTO: AFP

MORE NEWS

US Iran envoy to hold nuclear talks with Europe powers

US envoy for Iran Robert Malley was scheduled to meet diplomats from three European powers over the Iranian nuclear crisis as Vienna-based talks to salvage a 2015 deal remain suspended. Malley's trip to Paris for the meeting with the so-called E3 of Britain, France and Germany comes after he visited the Gulf for talks with allies Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who are all deeply concerned by Iran's nuclear programme.

Fire kills 15 at Russian explosives factory

Fifteen people died and one person was missing after a fire broke out at a Russian explosives factory southeast of Moscow yesterday, authorities said. The government of the Ryazan region, where the factory is based, said they had died in the factory blaze in the village of Lesnoye, 300 kilometres from the capital. Earlier officials said the fire could have broken out as a result of "violations of technological processes and safety measures" at the local PGUP Elastic factory.

Boyfriend of US roadtripper Gabby Petito found dead

Human remains found in a Florida nature reserve belong to the boyfriend of murdered road tripper Gabby Petito, US authorities said Thursday. The FBI said in a statement that "a comparison of dental records confirmed that the human remains... are those of Brian Laundrie." Laundrie, 23, had been named a "person of interest" in the killing of Petito, 22, who was found dead in September after the couple went on a road trip across the United States, documenting their journey in a stream of social media posts. But her family filed a missing person report on September 11 after Petito mysteriously vanished, and Laundrie returned home to Florida without her. Laundrie refused to say what happened to his girlfriend and then vanished himself, as authorities launched a nationwide search for Petito. Her death and the subsequent disappearance of the chief suspect sparked a blizzard of media coverage both in the United States and around the world.



Prop gun fired by Alec Baldwin kills woman on set: police

US actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun that killed a cinematographer and wounded the director on a film set in New Mexico, US law enforcement said Friday. The incident took place on the set of "Rust", where Baldwin is playing the lead in a 19th century western about an accidental killing. Halyna Hutchins and Joel Souza "were shot when a prop firearm was discharged by Alec Baldwin," the sheriff in Santa Fe said in a statement. "Mr. Baldwin was interviewed by detectives," Santa Fe sheriff spokesman Juan Rios told AFP. "He provided statements and answered their questions. He came in voluntarily and he left the building after he finished his interviews. No charges have been filed and no arrests have been made."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Queen Elizabeth resting after a day's hospital stay

Sources say monarch is in 'good spirits'

REUTERS, London

Britain's Queen Elizabeth, 95, was resting yesterday and undertaking light duties after she spent a night in hospital for the first time in years for what Buckingham Palace termed "preliminary investigations".

The world's oldest and longest-reigning monarch stayed in hospital overnight on Wednesday but returned to her Windsor Castle home to the west of London the following day, with officials saying she was in good spirits and back at work.

The queen, who cancelled an official trip to Northern Ireland on Wednesday, had been told to rest by her medical staff, Buckingham Palace said, but her ailment was not related to COVID-19.

"Following medical advice to rest for a few days, the queen attended hospital on Wednesday afternoon for some preliminary investigations, returning to Windsor Castle at lunchtime today, and remains in good spirits," the palace said late on Thursday.

Aides gave no details on what had prompted the medical attention, and some royal correspondents said they hoped the official version of events painted the full picture.

A royal source said the queen had stayed at the King Edward VII hospital in central London for practical reasons and that her medical team had taken a cautious approach.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's best wishes have been passed to Queen Elizabeth, his spokesman said.

The head of state, who next year celebrates 70 years on the throne, is known for her robust health. The last time she is thought to have spent a night in hospital was in 2013 when she was suffering from symptoms of gastroenteritis.



THREAT OF CHINA INVASION
US would defend Taiwan

Says Biden; Beijing asks Washington to 'act and speak cautiously'

AFP, Baltimore

The United States will defend Taiwan if China attacks it, President Joe Biden said, prompting a warning from Beijing yesterday that its determination to take back the democratic island should not be underestimated.

Authoritarian China regards self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to one day seize the island, by force if needed.

Beijing's sabre-rattling has ramped up in recent years, exacerbating fears the island of 23 million people could become a major global flashpoint.

At a CNN town hall, Biden was asked whether the US would come to Taiwan's defence if China invaded. "Yes," he responded. "We have a commitment to that."

Biden's statement was at odds with the long-held US policy known as "strategic ambiguity," where Washington helps build Taiwan's defenses but does not explicitly promise to come to the island's help in the event of war.

The policy is designed to deter a Chinese invasion and also discourage Taiwan from formally declaring independence -- something Beijing regards as a red line.

Biden's comments were welcomed

by Taiwan, which has pushed to bolster international alliances to protect itself from Beijing.

"The US government has demonstrated, through actual actions, their rock solid support for Taiwan," Presidential Office spokesperson Xavier Chang said in a statement yesterday.

But Beijing warned that Biden's comments risked "damaging Sino-US relations," warning Washington on Friday to "act and speak cautiously on the Taiwan issue."

"China has no room for compromise on issues involving its core interests," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular press briefing.

Biden made a similar pledge in August during an interview with ABC, insisting that the US would always defend key allies, including Taiwan, despite the withdrawal from Afghanistan in the face of the victorious Taliban.

The White House subsequently told reporters on both occasions that US policy on Taiwan "has not changed."

Richard McGregor, senior fellow for East Asia at the Lowy Institute, said the Biden administration had "firmly restated" its commitment to strategic

ambiguity.

"I suspect Biden was not trying to announce any change. So it was either loose language, or perhaps a slightly harder tone, deliberately adopted because of the way Beijing has increased the tempo of its military harassment of Taiwan recently," he told AFP.

China has ramped up economic, diplomatic and military pressure on Taiwan since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who views Taiwan as already sovereign and not part of "one China."

At Thursday's live town hall, Biden was also asked by an audience member whether the United States would be able to keep up with China's rapid military development.

Biden responded with "Yes."

"Don't worry about whether... they're going to be more powerful," he said. "China, Russia and the rest of the world knows we have the most powerful military in the history of the world."

Biden repeated his position that he does not want "to start a new Cold War with China."

But he warned: "I just want to make China understand that we are not going to step back."



'Europe will miss her'

EU leaders laud Merkel at her last summit

AFP, Brussels

European leaders heaped praise on German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday as she attended what is likely her last EU summit after a 16-year reign heavily influencing the bloc through major ups and downs.

Merkel has attended a staggering 107 EU summits that saw some of the biggest twists in recent European history, including the eurozone debt crisis, an inflow of Syrian refugees, Brexit and the creation of the bloc's landmark pandemic recovery fund.

"She is someone who for 16 years has really left her mark on Europe, helping all 27 of us to take the right decisions with a lot of humanity at times that were difficult," said Belgian Prime Minister Alexandre De Croo.

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel called Merkel a "compromise machine" who "usually did find something to unite us" through several marathon intra-EU negotiations.

"Europe will miss her," he said. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said he hoped Merkel, a "great politician", would remain on the political scene "in one

form or another".

Her final summit, a two-day affair in Brussels, leaned once again on her soft-power skills to ease a burning row with Poland over its rejection of the EU's legal order -- something many believed could be the next existential threat to the European Union.

East-west feuding has been a recurrent theme in Merkel's long tenure.

Her mediating role reflected both the status of Germany as the EU's economic powerhouse with sway over many of the former Soviet-bloc countries that later joined the Union, which tilted the political balance away from Paris and towards Berlin.

Germany is still in the process of putting together a government to replace Merkel's, following September elections she did not contest that saw her conservative CDU party handed a drubbing.

In Brussels, her legacy will still be glimpsed in the person of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, formerly Merkel's defence minister who was nominated to her position in no small part thanks to the outgoing German leader.

US intel services see security threat in climate change

India among 'countries of concern'

AGENCIES

US intelligence services said Thursday for the first time that climate change poses wide-ranging threats to the United States' national security and stability around the world.

More extreme weather "will increasingly exacerbate a number of risks to US national security interests, from physical impacts that could cascade into security challenges, to how countries respond to the climate challenge," the White House said in a summary of the intelligence reports.

The prediction was made in the first official assessment by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, or OONI, which oversees the sprawling US intelligence apparatus.

The document "represents the consensus view of all 18" elements in the intelligence community, the White House said.

According to the agencies, climate change is driving "increased geopolitical tension as countries argue over who should be doing more," cross-border "flashpoints" as countries respond to climate change impact by trying to secure their own interests, and fallout from climate on national stability in some countries.

Afghanistan, India and Pakistan were among 11 countries singled out by the report as being "highly vulnerable" in terms of their ability to prepare for and respond to environmental and societal crises caused by climate change.

In a new National Intelligence Estimate, OONI predicts that global warming will increase geopolitical tensions and risks to US national security in the period up to 2040.

Thursday's report identifies as particular "countries of concern" Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq, North Korea, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Colombia.

Heat, drought, water availability and ineffective government make Afghanistan specifically worrying. Water disputes are also a key geopolitical flashpoint in India and the rest of South Asia.

The report also notes the likelihood of increasing strategic competition over the Arctic. It says that Arctic and non-Arctic states "almost certainly will increase their competitive activities as the region becomes more accessible because of warming temperatures and reduced ice."

92 Yemen rebels killed near Marib

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen yesterday said it had killed at least 92 Huthi rebels in air strikes on two districts in the past 24 hours near the strategic city of Marib.

The deaths are the latest among hundreds that the coalition says have been killed in recent fighting around Marib.

The latest air strikes reported were in the districts of Al-Jawba, some 50 kilometres south of Marib, and Al-Kassara, 30 kilometres northwest.



Plastics to outpace coal's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030

REUTERS, Washington

The carbon-intensive production of plastics is on pace to emit more greenhouse gases than coal-fired power plants within this decade, undercutting global efforts to tackle climate change, a report released on Thursday said.

The report by Bennington College and Beyond Plastics projected that the plastic industry releases at least 232 million tons of greenhouse gases each year throughout its lifecycle from the drilling for oil and gas to fuel its facilities to incineration of plastic waste. That is the equivalent of 116 coal-fired power plants.

"The scale of the plastics industry's greenhouse gas emissions is staggering, but it's equally concerning that few people in government or in the business community are even talking about it," said Judith Enck, a former Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator and president of Beyond Plastics.

Also, the report found that petrochemical facilities tend to be clustered in just 18 largely low-income and minority communities, where 90% of the pollution occurs.

With at least a dozen more plastic production plants under construction and 15 more planned, resulting emissions would undercut any gains made by phasing out coal power and shifting toward more renewable energy, Enck said.

The report also said authorities probably have undercounted emissions and air pollution related to different stages of the production of plastics and export of plastic waste. That is because U.S. regulations do not require the plastic industry to report them and no federal agency tracks them, said report author Jim Vallette of research group Material Research.



OCTOBER 23

1942 - British and Commonwealth forces led by General Montgomery launched a huge offensive against German and Italian forces under General Rommel at El Alamein, Egypt.

2001 - The Irish Republican Army said it had begun to disarm, an unprecedented step to end decades of bloodshed and boost Northern Ireland's shaky peace process.

SOURCE: REUTERS