

Quote of the day



“We’re Slavs. We have hearts. Our troops know the migrants are going to Germany ... Maybe someone helped them. But I didn’t invite them here.”

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ALEXANDER LUKASHENKO ON THE MIGRANT CRISIS AT POLAND-BELARUS BORDER AS EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE UNITED STATES ACCUSE MINSK AND RUSSIA OF ARTIFICIALLY CREATING THE CRISIS BY BRINGING IN PEOPLE FROM ABROAD



Residents sit amid debris of their burnt houses after a fire broke out in a slum area in Karachi, Pakistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MORE NEWS

Taliban begin paying salaries to govt employees

Afghanistan’s Taliban authorities yesterday said they had begun paying government employees who had not received a paycheck since the Islamists seized power and triggered a major financial crisis. A spokesman for the finance ministry said at a press conference that workers will get three months’ salary. The financial crunch was aggravated after Washington froze about \$10 billion of assets held in its reserve for Kabul and deteriorated further after the World Bank and International Monetary Fund halted Afghanistan’s access to funding.

US ‘deeply concerned’ by missing China tennis star

The United States is “deeply concerned” about Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, who went missing after making sexual assault allegations against a top Communist Party official, the White House said Friday. Press Secretary Jen Psaki said President Joe Biden’s administration wants China to “provide independent, verifiable proof” of her whereabouts. The US call came as international concern mounts for the tennis star, missing since alleging earlier this month that she was sexually exploited by a former vice-premier of China. The United Nations on Friday insisted on a fully transparent investigation into the claims made by Peng, formerly the world’s top-ranked doubles player, against Communist Party grandee Zhang Gaoli.

Time shrinking for Iran deal: US

The US envoy for Iran Robert Malley warned Friday that Tehran was approaching the point of no return for reviving a nuclear deal after it boosted its stocks of enriched uranium before talks resume this month. This week, with Iran set for talks with world powers in Vienna on November 29, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Tehran had again increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. On Wednesday, the US and its Gulf Arab allies accused Iran of causing a nuclear crisis and destabilising the region with its ballistic missile programme and support for armed militias.

ICC suspends investigation of Philippines ‘war on drugs’

The International Criminal Court has suspended its investigation into suspected rights abuses committed under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s “war on drugs” following a request from Manila. The Hague-based court in September authorised a probe of the campaign that has left thousands of people dead, saying it resembled an illegitimate and systematic attack on civilians. Duterte was elected in 2016 on a campaign promise to get rid of the Philippines’ drug problem, openly ordering police to kill drug suspects if officers’ lives were in danger. At least 6,181 people have died in more than 200,000 anti-drug operations conducted since July 2016, according to the latest official data released by the Philippines.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Jabs alone won’t stop infections

Europe learns the bitter lesson as continent faces new wave of Covid cases

AGENCIES

As Western Europe’s vaccination rollout gained strength in the early part of 2021, many of the region’s leaders touted the shots as their immediate route out of the pandemic.

Press conferences took on an almost celebratory tone as presidents, prime ministers and chancellors announced road maps away from Covid-19 restrictions, hailing their country’s uptake rates and speaking colorfully about a return to normalcy.

But as another Covid-struck winter grips Europe, many of those countries are now reversing course.

Ireland introduced a midnight curfew on the hospitality industry earlier this week amid a surge in cases, despite having one of Europe’s best vaccination rates. In Portugal -- the envy of the continent, where 87 percent of the total population is inoculated -- the government is mulling new measures as infections inch upwards.



And in the Netherlands new restrictions have come into force, prompting protests that turned violent in Rotterdam on Friday night.

Some might wonder how both things can be true. But as nations are discovering, even a relatively strong vaccination rate is not enough alone to stop the spread of Covid-19 -- and warning signs from Germany and Austria, where infections have skyrocketed in recent weeks -- show the dangers of complacency.

The number of new daily coronavirus cases increased sharply by nine percent globally to 517,600, according to an AFP tally to Thursday.

Nine of the 10 countries where the situation worsened fastest were in Europe, AFP data showed.

No matter how impressive a country’s vaccination rate appears, experts insist that vaccines alone can’t be expected to halt a country’s epidemic.

“The vaccine is controlling deaths -- but what we’re seeing is a virus that has established itself as endemic, and in some countries it’s made greater progress than others because there have been less rigid controls,” said David Heymann, a former executive director of the WHO’s Communicable Diseases Cluster

“What we have now is an epidemic of the unvaccinated,” said Sam McConkey, head of the International Health and Tropical Medicine department at the RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences in Dublin.

Experts stress that the protection against serious illness and deaths remains strong in double-vaccinated people, even without a booster shot.

30 dead or missing in floods in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 30 people are dead or missing after flash floods hit southern India, reports yesterday, with three buses washed away in one incident.

Rescue teams pulled out a dozen bodies after three buses were washed away in Andhra Pradesh state on Friday. At least 18 other people were still missing, media outlet The NewsMinute reported.

Analysts say unpredictable and extreme weather across South Asia is driven by climate change, exacerbated by damming, deforestation and excessive development.

Dozens have died since October in India after heavy rains triggered floods and landslides, and the country’s Met office said more heavy rains were expected in several southern areas on Saturday.

At least 42 people were killed last month when heavy rains pummelled Kerala, and on Friday authorities in the state halted entry to Sabarimala, one of Hinduism’s holiest shrines, due to heavy rains in the area.

Hundreds of devotees have been making the trek to Sabarimala since the shrine opened last week. Rising water levels in the Pamba river, considered holy by the pilgrims, forced officials to stop devotees for a day, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported yesterday.



NOVEMBER 21

1818 - Russia’s Tsar Alexander I petitions for a Jewish state in Palestine.

1916 - Emperor Franz Josef, ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire since 1848, died. His attack on Serbia helped to precipitate World War One.

1994 - Nato launched an air strike against a rebel Serb-held airfield in Croatia.

1995 - Parties at peace talks in Dayton, Ohio, reached an accord to end the Bosnian war.

SOURCE: REUTERS

US commitment to Middle East ‘strong and sure’

Pentagon chief seeks to reassure concerned allies

REUTERS, Manama

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin yesterday sought to reassure allies in the Middle East that President Joe Biden’s administration was committed to the region despite Washington increasingly turning its attention towards countering China.

It was unclear how much impact Austin’s speech would have with Washington’s allies in the Middle East, since it was not backed by any announcements of further deployments or new weapon sales in the region.

Gulf Arab states, heavily reliant on the US military umbrella, have expressed uncertainty about Biden’s focus on the region, especially after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. They are now closely watching efforts to revive a global-powers nuclear pact with Iran.

In a speech in Bahrain during a trip to the Gulf, Austin acknowledged concern in the region and globally that the United States was solely focussed on China’s challenge.

“Let’s be clear: America’s commitment to security in the Middle East is strong and sure,” Austin said.

He said the United States was committed

to countering Iran, even as Washington works to revive the 2015 nuclear deal.

“We remain committed to a diplomatic outcome of the nuclear issue. But if Iran isn’t willing to engage seriously, then we will look at all the options necessary to keep the United States secure,” Austin said.

The Pentagon chief said that Washington would be coming to the indirect negotiations on reviving the deal starting on Nov. 29 in Vienna in good faith.

“But Iran’s actions in recent months have not been encouraging,” he Austin said.

Gulf states have asked for any deal to address what they call Iran’s ballistic missile programme and destabilising behaviour in the region.

“There’s dismay that the United States is on its way out the door. I’m not sure messaging addresses that sense of impending American abandonment,” said Jon Alterman of the Washington CSIS think-tank.

A senior US defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Austin was not expected to make new commitments in the region during his trip.



A demonstrator holds a placard during a protest against the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict at the Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, New York, US on Friday. There have been calls for calm in the US after a teenager who shot dead two people during racial unrest last year was cleared of all charges.

PHOTO: AFP

‘Blood Moon’ dazzles night skies



REUTERS

The longest partial lunar eclipse in a millennium dazzled night skies around the world on Friday, in an event dubbed the ‘Blood Moon’ due to its red haze.

The partial eclipse, which lasted 3 hours, 28 minutes and 23 seconds, is the longest since February 18, 1440, according to NASA. Stunning views of the partial lunar eclipse could be seen in parts of the United States, Asia and South America. During the eclipse, up to 99.1% of the Moon’s disk was within Earth’s darkest shadow, NASA said.

Missed it? You will have to wait until 2669 before you can see a partial lunar eclipse that is longer than this one. However, there will be a longer total lunar eclipse in November of next year.

Cash truck spill prompts California freeway frenzy

AFP, Los Angeles

An armored truck spilled huge wads of cash across a California freeway Friday, prompting chaotic scenes as drivers stopped to scoop up banknotes.

But motorists hoping to line their pockets with an unexpected pre-Thanksgiving windfall were thwarted, as police cracked down and arrested two people.

“There’s a lot of video evidence of people stealing the cash from the freeway, picking it up,” California Highway Patrol Sgt. Curtis Martin told a news conference.

The money--of various denominations, totaling thousands of dollars -- belongs to a bank and must be returned to a police station, he added.

The freeway free-for-all began after a door of the armored truck flew open near San Diego on the Interstate-5, which runs from California’s Mexican border all the

way to Canada.

Video posted to social media showed people dashing around the roadway, scooping up cash and even throwing handfuls of greenbacks into the air in celebration.

“Have you ever seen this before?! What would you do?!” posted @demibagby on Instagram.

But police warned that the same footage would be used to track down anyone who does not swiftly hand over the cash.

“It’s better for them to do the honesty policy than to wait for us to track them down and knock on their door,” said Martin.

The two arrests were made after a man and woman who had joined the dash for cash accidentally locked themselves out of their car, blocking a lane and leaving themselves unable to depart the scene.

Historic 1hour 25 minutes

Harris becomes first woman to get US presidential powers as Biden undergoes a regular health check

AGENCIES

US Vice-President Kamala Harris on Friday became the first woman to - briefly - be given presidential powers while Joe Biden underwent a regular health check.

Harris, 57, was in control for 85 minutes, while Biden was placed under anaesthesia for a routine colonoscopy.

She is the first woman - and the first black and South Asian American - to be elected US vice-president.

Biden got a clean bill of health from the White House doctor after undergoing an extensive, routine check-up.

“The President remains a healthy, vigorous, 78-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency, to include those as Chief Executive, Head of State and Commander in Chief,” Kevin O’Connor, the White

House physician, wrote.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the temporary transfer of powers in such circumstances was not unprecedented, and that it was part of the process set out in the US constitution.

“As was the case when President George W Bush had the same procedure in 2002 and 2007,” she said in a statement.

The president was seen smiling as he returned to the White House. “I feel great,” Biden said.

Kevin O’Connor said the colonoscopy found a “benign-appear polyp” that was easily removed.

Biden, the oldest US president to take office, had his last full medical examination in December 2019.

At the time, his doctor released a medical report describing him as “healthy, vigorous” and “fit to successfully execute the duties of the presidency”.

