



A pedestrian walks in the snow in Victoria Park, in the West End of Glasgow, Scotland, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Anger as Cambodia PM visits Myanmar

REUTERS

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen yesterday met Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing amid criticism of the first visit by a head of government since the army seized power from an elected government last year.

Hun Sen was greeted by an honour guard and red carpet when he arrived yesterday, just as protests by coup opponents broke out in other parts of the country over fears his trip will provide more legitimacy to the junta.

Hun Sen's two-day visit was the first by a head of government since the army overthrew the civilian administration of Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb 1 last year, sparking months of protests and a bloody crackdown.

The Cambodian leader, who has been criticised over crackdowns on his political opponents at home, has said he was making the visit to press a Myanmar peace plan sponsored by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

Cambodia is current chair of the 10-member Asean.

In Depayin, about 300 km north of the capital, Naypyidaw, protesters burned a poster of the Cambodian prime minister and chanted "Hun Sen don't come to Myanmar. We don't want dictator Hun Sen", photographs on social media showed. There were also reports of protests in the second city of Mandalay and the Tanintharyi and Monywa regions.

In October, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing was barred from attending an Asean summit for his failure to cease hostilities, allow humanitarian access and start dialogue, as agreed with Asean.

But in a further sign of divisions in the 10-member bloc, Hun Sen last month said junta officials should be allowed to attend Asean meetings.

Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for Research Emerlyne Gil said the trip risked sending mixed messages to Myanmar's military leader.

US-funded Radio Free Asia cited a junta spokesman as saying Hun Sen would not meet Suu Kyi.

'Shoot to kill'

Kazakh leader tells forces, rejects talks



AFP, Almaty

Kazakhstan's president yesterday rejected calls for talks with protesters after days of unprecedented unrest, vowing to destroy "armed bandits" and authorising his forces to shoot to kill without warning.

He said earlier that order had mostly been restored across the country, after protests this week over fuel prices escalated into widespread violence, especially in main city Almaty.

"Terrorists continue to damage property... and use weapons against civilians. I have given the order to law enforcement to shoot to kill without warning," Tokayev said in his third televised address to the nation this week.

He ridiculed calls from abroad for negotiations as "nonsense".

Long seen as one of the most stable of the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, energy-rich Kazakhstan is facing its biggest crisis in decades.

Protesters stormed government buildings in Almaty on Wednesday and fought running battles with police and the military, with officials saying 748 security officers were wounded and 18 killed.

Tokayev said Almaty had been attacked by "20,000 bandits" with a "clear plan of attack, coordination of actions and high combat readiness."

He gave his "special thanks" to Russian President Vladimir Putin after the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) sent troops to Kazakhstan to help quell the unrest.

It marked the alliance's first major joint action since its founding in 1999.

The interior ministry yesterday said that security forces had taken all the country's regions "under increased protection" and that 26 "armed criminals" had been killed and 18 wounded in the unrest.

Authorities declared a nationwide state of emergency until January 19, with curfews, restrictions on movements and bans on mass gatherings.

The interior ministry said Thursday it had detained about 2,300 people. Officials said more than 1,000 people had been wounded in the unrest, with nearly 400 admitted to hospital and more than 60 in intensive care.

Protests spread across the nation of 19 million this week in outrage over a New Year increase in prices for liquid petroleum gas (LPG), which is used to fuel many cars in the country.

Thousands took to the streets in Almaty and in the western province of Mangystau, saying the price rise was unfair given oil and gas exporter Kazakhstan's vast energy reserves.

The full picture of the chaos has often been unclear, with widespread disruptions to communications including mobile phone signals, the blocking of online messengers and hours-long internet shutdowns.

Western countries have called for restraint on all sides, with US State Department spokesman Ned Price warning Russian troops in Kazakhstan against taking control of the country's institutions.



BMW unveils colour-changing car

REUTERS, Las Vegas

German carmaker BMW has unveiled the world's first "colour-changing" car at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. The concept car, called the BMW iX Flow, uses electronic ink technology normally found in e-readers to transform the car's exterior into a variety of patterns in gray and white. When stimulated by electrical signals controlled by a phone app, the material brings different pigments to the surface, causing the car to take on a different shade or design, such as racing stripes. In the future, the changes would also be controlled by a button on the car's dashboard or perhaps even by hand gestures, Clarke said. Though the vehicle displayed at CES could only alternate between gray and white, the technology will be expanded to cover a spectrum of colour, according to BMW.

US boycott of Beijing 'insult' to Olympic spirit: North Korea

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has slammed the US led diplomatic boycott of February's Beijing Winter Games, state media reported yesterday, describing it as an "insult" to the Olympic spirit. Washington and some of its allies have announced a diplomatic boycott, citing China's human rights record, in a decision that incensed Beijing. North Korean Olympic and sports bodies criticised the boycott in a letter to their Chinese counterparts, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said. "The US and its vassal forces are getting ever more undisguised in their moves against China aimed at preventing the successful opening of the Olympics," the letter said, according to KCNA. Their moves are "an insult to the spirit of the international Olympic Charter". China is the main ally and economic benefactor of impoverished North Korea, which is suspended from competing in the Chinese capital for its refusal to take part in Tokyo Games last year because of Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian man has taken at least eight Covid jobs

BBC ONLINE

A man in India got jabbed with a Covid-19 vaccine at least eight times last year, a health official said. Brahmedo Mandal, 65, has claimed that he received 11 doses of the vaccine in Bihar state. The retired postman said the jabs had helped him to get rid of aches and pains and "stay healthy". He claimed he had not suffered any adverse effects. Mandal was finally stopped from taking what he claimed was his 12th jab at a camp last week. A probe is underway to find out how Mandal, who lives with his family in Madhepura district, managed to get multiple jabs. He told the BBC that he travelled to vaccination camps across Madhepura and even to at least two neighbouring districts - one more than 100km (62 miles) away - to get the jabs. He used different identity cards to register at these sites.



Mahathir in hospital again

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad was admitted to hospital yesterday, the medical facility said, weeks after he was discharged following a check-up.

The National Heart Institute said the 96-year-old was admitted for an "elective medical procedure" but did not provide further details.

Mahathir has had heart problems in the past, suffering several heart attacks.

He has been one of Malaysia's most dominant political figures in recent decades, serving twice as PM for a total of 24 years.

Overwhelmed by Omicron, US hospitals delay surgeries

UK to deploy troops to London hospitals; France expects new wave to peak around 10 days time

AGENCIES

Hospitals across the United States are postponing elective surgeries to free up staff and beds due to a surge in Covid-19 cases driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Administrators say hospital staff shortages have been compounded in the last month by medical practitioners isolating as they themselves are infected or exposed to the virus.

Hospital systems in nearly half of US states have announced they would postpone elective surgeries, a Reuters review of public statements and local media reports found, and at least three state governments; New York, Illinois, and Massachusetts, have implemented or recommended state-wide delays.

The seven-day average of Covid-19 patients admitted to hospitals was up 60 percent from last week to 16,458 per day, CDC data shows, just 0.2 percent shy from the national peak in hospital admissions exactly a year ago.

Data from the US Department of

Health and Human Services shows that over 82 percent of ICU beds nationwide are currently in use as of Thursday with over 27 percent in use for Covid-19 cases.

In Europe, France reported 261,481 new coronavirus infections on Thursday, less than the record of more than 332,000 set on Wednesday, but the seven-day moving average of new cases rose above 200,000 for the first time since the start of the health crisis. The French health ministry also reported 204 new deaths, taking the total Covid-19 death tally to over 125,000.

Professor Alain Fischer, an official responsible for France's Covid vaccine strategy, said the current Covid-19 wave engulfing the country could reach its peak in around 10 days time.

Britain yesterday said it will deploy troops to hospitals in London to alleviate severe staff shortages caused by the Omicron outbreak. Around 200 armed forces personnel will join health workers in the capital, which has been particularly badly hit by the recent upsurge in coronavirus cases leading to mass staff absences in hospitals.



A pro-refugee activist carries a placard outside a government detention centre where Serbia's tennis champion Novak Djokovic is reported to be staying in Melbourne yesterday, after Australia said it had cancelled the entry visa of Djokovic, opening the way to his detention and deportation. The former Park Hotel, now officially known as an "alternative place of detention", holds about 32 refugees and asylum seekers trapped in Australia's hardline immigration system. Detainees cannot leave and nobody is allowed in or out except staff.

PHOTO: AFP