

ECONOMIC CRISIS

South Korea pardons Samsung boss

AFP, Seoul

The heir and de facto leader of the Samsung group received a presidential pardon yesterday, continuing South Korea's long tradition of freeing business leaders convicted of corruption on economic grounds.

Billionaire Lee Jae-yong, convicted of bribery and embezzlement in January last year, will be "reinstated" to give him a chance to "contribute to overcoming the economic crisis" of the country, justice minister Han Dong-hoon said.

Lee -- who has a net worth of \$7.9 billion, according to Forbes -- was released on parole in August 2021, after serving 18 months in jail, just over half of his original sentence.

Yesterday's pardon will allow him to fully return to work by lifting a post-prison employment restriction that had been set for five years.

TAIWAN TENSIONS

India sticks to 'one-China' policy stance

REUTERS, New Delhi

India said yesterday it opposed any unilateral change to the status quo over Taiwan but that its stance on the 'one-China' policy remained consistent, days after Beijing said it hoped New Delhi would continue to recognise its claim to self-governing Taiwan.

China deployed multiple aircraft and warships around Taiwan in recent days, angered by last week's visit to the island by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, which Beijing vehemently opposed.

China's threat of force is undiminished, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said on Thursday, even though Beijing's largest ever military drills around the island seemed to be scaling down.

Beijing said on Wednesday it would keep up patrols but had "completed various tasks" around Taiwan, signalling a possible end to the war games even while keeping up pressure.

Taiwan has also been conducting relatively small-scale, annual exercises, scheduled before the flare-up and aimed at preparing to repel an invasion.

"At present, the threat of Chinese military force has not decreased," Tsai told air force officers, according to a statement from her office.

Taiwan will not escalate conflict nor provoke disputes, her office quoted her as saying, adding: "We will firmly defend our sovereignty and national security, and adhere to the line of defence of democracy and freedom."

Arctic warming four times faster than rest of Earth

AFP, Paris

The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the rest of the planet over the last 40 years, according to research published Thursday that suggests climate models are underestimating the rate of polar heating.

The United Nations' climate science panel said in a special report in 2019 that the Arctic was warming "by more than double the global average" due to a process known as Arctic amplification.

This occurs when sea ice and snow, which naturally reflect the Sun's heat, melt into sea water, which absorbs it instead.

While there is a long-held consensus among scientists that the Arctic is warming quickly, estimates vary according to the timeframe studied and the definition of what constitutes the geographic area of the Arctic.

A team of researchers based in Norway and Finland analysed four sets of temperature data gathered by satellite studies since 1979 -- the year when satellite data became available -- over the entire Arctic circle.

They found that on average the data showed the Arctic had warmed 0.75C per decade, nearly four times quicker than the rest of the planet.

"The take in the literature is that the Arctic is warming about twice as fast as the globe, so for me it was a bit surprising that ours was so much higher than the usual number," Antti Lipponen, co-author from the Finnish Meteorological Institute, told AFP.

The study, published in the journal Communications Earth & Environment, found significant regional variations in warming rate within the Arctic circle.



A fawn tries to escape the fire in Belin-Beliet as wildfires continue to spread in the Gironde region of southwestern France, yesterday. Blazes that have torched tens of thousands of hectares of forest in France, Spain and Portugal have made 2022 a record year for wildfire activity in southwestern Europe. the EU's satellite monitoring service said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

10 Chinese planes crossed Taiwan Strait median line

Says Taiwan, five Chinese state-owned companies to delist from NYSE amid tensions with US

REUTERS, Taipei

Ten Chinese aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line, an unofficial barrier between China and Taiwan, yesterday, the Taiwanese defence ministry said.

China's air force has repeatedly flown across the line over the past week as part of war games staged in reaction to the visit to the Chinese-claimed island by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, which Beijing vehemently opposed.

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A source briefed on the matter told Reuters that the number of warships close to the Taiwan Strait's median line, an unofficial buffer, was "greatly reduced" from previous days.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said in a statement it had on Thursday detected 21 Chinese military aircraft and six Chinese naval ships in and around the Taiwan Strait, of which 11 planes had crossed over the median line.

That was down from the 36 aircraft and 10 ships detected the previous day, when 17 aircraft crossed the median line.

Meanwhile, five Chinese state-owned firms including China Life Insurance 601628.SS and oil giant Sinopec 600028.SS said yesterday

they would delist from the New York Stock Exchange, amid heightened diplomatic and economic tensions with the United States.

The companies, which also include Aluminium Corporation of China (Chalco) 601600.SS, PetroChina 601857.SS and Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical Co 600688.SS, said in separate statements that they would apply for delistings of their American Depository Shares from later this month.

China's foreign ministry said yesterday it had imposed sanctions on Lithuanian Deputy Transport and Communications Minister Agne Vaitukeviciute for visiting Taiwan, the latest development in a simmering diplomatic row with the European Union country.

Tunisia says 82 migrants rescued

AFP, Tunis

Tunisian authorities intercepted five new migration attempts overnight and rescued or intercepted 82 people, the interior ministry said yesterday.

National Guard units "from the north, centre, south and coast" of Tunisia foiled the attempts "as part of the fight against irregular migration", a statement said.

Tunisia is a key departure point for migrants hoping to reach Europe -- usually Italy -- and sea crossing attempts tend to increase during spring and summer.

Yesterday's statement said 76 people were rescued in four operations at sea, and another six were intercepted on land in the Gabes and Sfax areas.

It did not provide details the nationalities of the migrants.

The statement said that both Tunisian and foreign currency were seized, although the amounts were not specified. Media in the North African country reported a shipwreck on Tuesday off the Kerkennah islands in which eight Tunisians -- three women, four children and a man -- died. And on Sunday, the National Guard said that 170 people from sub-Saharan Africa were among 255 migrants intercepted during 17 attempted crossings.

HEATWAVE, LOW RAINFALL

Drought declared in parts of England

AFP, London

The UK government yesterday officially declared a drought in several parts of England, following months of record low rainfall and unprecedented temperatures in recent weeks.

At a meeting of the National Drought Group, the government's Environment Agency said the "drought trigger threshold had been met" in parts of southwestern, southern, central and eastern England.

Drought was last officially declared in England in 2018.

The Environment Agency yesterday published a report saying that England as a whole had its driest July since 1935.

The exceptional weather comes as France is also experiencing a record drought and battling huge wildfires.

The Met Office, the UK's meteorological authority, said the period from January to June this year saw the least rainfall in England and Wales since 1976.

That summer saw the use of drastic measures such as roadside standpipes and water rationing.

The government statement said the move to drought status was based on factors such as rainfall, river flows and levels of groundwater and reservoirs and their impact on public water supply.

"We urge everyone to manage the amount of water they are using in this exceptionally dry period," National Drought Group chair, Harvey Bradshaw, was quoted as saying.

The Environment Agency and water companies "will step up their actions to manage impacts" and press ahead with their published drought plans, including thinks like hosepipe bans.

TRUMP HOME SEARCH

FBI sought nuke docs: report

REUTERS, Washington

US federal agents were looking for documents relating to nuclear weapons when they raided former President Donald Trump's home in Florida this week, the Washington Post reported on Thursday. It was not clear if such documents were recovered at the former president's Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, the Post said. Reuters could not immediately confirm the report. The US Justice Department asked a judge on Thursday to make public the warrant that authorized the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, after Trump, a Republican, portrayed it as political retribution. The request means the public could soon learn more about what investigators were looking for during the unprecedented search of a former president's home.



Migrant labourer shot dead in J&K

NDTV ONLINE

A migrant labourer from Bihar was shot dead by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipore, police said yesterday. The attack took place around midnight in Ajas area of Bandipore district. After being shot, Mohammad Amrez, a resident of Bihar's Madhepura, was rushed to the hospital where the doctors declared him dead on arrival. "During intervening night, terrorists fired upon & injured one migrant labourer Mohd Amrez, r/o Madhepura, Besarh, Bihar at Soadnara Sumbal, Bandipora. He was shifted to hospital for treatment where he succumbed," tweeted Kashmir Zone police.

MYANMAR TRIAL

Australian pleads not guilty

REUTERS

An Australian economist and former adviser to deposed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has pleaded not guilty in a closed Myanmar court to charges of violating a state secrets law, according to media reports yesterday.

Sean Turnell has been detained in Myanmar since February 6 last year, a few days after the military ousted Suu Kyi's elected government in a coup. He faces up to 14 years in prison if convicted.

Australian broadcaster ABC cited a legal official as saying Turnell had testified in court for the first time since his arrest but few details were available.

Australian Acting Prime Minister Richard Marles said he was "concerned about the level of access that is available to those providing consular services to" Turnell.



Palestinians run away from members of Israeli forces during a protest against Israeli settlement activity near Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS