

MEDIA FREEDOM EU unveils rules to thwart state meddling

AFP, Brussels

The European Commission unveiled a raft of new rules yesterday to ensure media independence after growing fears of state meddling in eastern EU countries such as Hungary and Poland.

Brussels has grown increasingly worried about the weight of the state on news and media in a growing number of EU countries, with public television in Hungary widely seen as a mouthpiece for Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Media pluralism is also a concern in the Czech Republic where former prime minister Andrej Babis owns a major media group.

The European Media Freedom Act will provide "common safeguards... to guarantee that our media are able to operate without any interference, be it private or public," said EU commissioner Thierry Breton.

"We're proposing a regulation which will apply across the board in Europe in the same way and according to the same rules," he said.

One of the main components of the law will be a new authority that will allow the EU's 27 countries to have an eye on media mergers that would affect the plurality of media ownership. It will also demand that funding of state media be "adequate and stable" in order to prevent governments from using budget allocations to pressure publicly owned media companies and newsrooms.

The regulation, which needs to be approved by EU member countries and the European Parliament, would also require that national governments pass laws that adequately guarantee the protection of journalistic sources.

The European-wide watchdog will be composed of national regulators that would ensure the proper enforcement of the law across the EU.



Members of the public stand in the queue near Tower Bridge, and opposite the Tower of London, as they wait in line to pay their respects to the late Queen Elizabeth II, who is lying-in-state at Westminster Abbey, in London, yesterday. The British government yesterday urged people not to join the miles-long queue to see the late Queen lying in state in London after warning of waiting times of at least 14 hours. The beloved Queen will be lying-in-state till September 19, the day of her funeral.

PHOTO: AFP

Now is 'not a time for war' Indian PM Modi tells Putin

AFP, Samarkand

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday told Russian President Vladimir Putin that now was "not a time for war" on the sidelines of a regional summit, television images showed.

New Delhi and Moscow have longstanding ties dating back to the Cold War, and Russia remains by far India's biggest arms supplier.

But in their first face-to-face meeting since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine in February, Modi told Putin: "Excellency, I know today's time is not a time for war."

India has shied away from explicitly condemning Russia for the invasion.

Modi stressed the importance of "democracy and diplomacy and dialogue" in the meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in the Uzbek city of Samarkand, footage showed on Indian public service broadcaster Doordashan.

In reply, Putin told Modi that he understood New Delhi's concerns about the conflict in Ukraine and wanted it to end "as soon as possible", according to a readout of a bilateral meeting published by the Kremlin.



SCO calls for 'balance' in climate approach

Slams 'coercive measures' to force developing countries into reducing emissions at a set pace

REUTERS, Samarkand

Leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation called for a "balance" between reducing carbon emissions and allowing poorer states to catch up with economically developed countries in a joint statement on climate change adopted yesterday.

In the statement, the heads of some of the world's biggest emitters - including China, India and Russia - said they unanimously recognised the negative consequences of climate change and the need for urgent action, but called for increased investment in oil and gas production and exploration.

The group also slammed "coercive measures" to force countries into reducing emissions at a set pace, saying countries "have the right to independently set national goals in the field of climate change prevention".

"Unilateral coercive measures violate multilateral principles, seriously undermine multilateral cooperation

and collective and national efforts to address climate change, and weaken the ability of countries to address climate change," the leaders of the SCO member states said in their joint statement.

SCO members account for around half the global population. On Thursday, Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to become the ninth permanent SCO member.

In the statement, SCO leaders said they were calling for a "balanced approach between emissions reduction and development, supporting a fair transition" to a greener economy.

Russia, India and China have at times all been accused in the West of not doing enough to address climate change, but argue that poorer and developing countries should be given more leeway to prioritise economic growth over climate issues.

China and Russia are aiming to reach "net zero" emissions by 2060, while India said that the country was setting 2070 as its target.

CRISIS IN LEBANON

5 bank 'heists' in a day as people seek back frozen savings

AFP, Beirut

Five Lebanese banks were stormed yesterday by depositors seeking to unlock frozen savings, the latest in a string of "heists" in the crisis-hit country. Lebanon has been mired in an economic crisis for more than two years, since the value of its currency began plummeting and banks started imposing draconian restrictions on withdrawals. In one case yesterday, a man carrying a gun and jerrycan of fuel demanded staff at a branch of the Byblos bank in the southern town of Ghaziyyeh hand over his deposit. Accompanied by his son, the man in his 50s threatened bank staff with the gun, which a Lebanese television channel said may have been a toy, before making his demand. The man walked away with about \$19,000 in cash but turned himself in to police moments later. The spate of heists comes two days after a young activist stormed a central Beirut bank with fuel and plastic gun to demand the deposits of her sister, who needed to pay for cancer treatment. The woman identified as Sali Hafiz made off with around \$13,000 and became an instant hero on social media.

Free Russian fertilisers to developing world!

REUTERS, Samarkand

President Vladimir Putin said Russia was ready to provide more than 300,000 tonnes of Russian fertilisers stuck in European ports to the developing world for free if Europe agreed to further relax sanctions on Russian exports. Putin said Russia welcomed a decision by the European Union to ease some logistical sanctions on Russian exports, but accused the bloc of acting "selfishly" by only lifting sanctions for its own members. Putin said Russia has 300,000 tonnes of fertilisers currently sitting in European ports that Moscow was ready to send to the developing world for free when the sanctions are lifted.

India's Adani briefly listed as world's 2nd-richest person

AFP, Mumbai



Adani briefly became the world's second-richest person on the Forbes real-time billionaire tracker on Friday, weeks after becoming the first Asian to break into the top three. The self-made billionaire's net worth surged \$4 billion overnight to \$154 billion, according to Forbes, ranking him ahead of LVMH's Bernard Arnault and Amazon's Jeff Bezos. Tesla founder Elon Musk remained well out in front with a fortune of more than \$270 billion.

Bangladesh storm

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rounded off the Bhutan goalkeeper to slot home the first goal.

Hat-trick hero Sabina scored the next goal when she, having received a through pass from Maria Manda from the right flank, dribbled past the advancing goalkeeper and netted an angular shot with composure in the 17th minute.

Sabina completed her hat-trick with two more goals in the second half as Bangladesh routed a feeble Bhutan with four goals in each half.

Mars rover

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Nicknamed Percy, the rover landed on Mars' Jezero Crater in February 2021, tasked with caching samples that may contain signs of ancient life, as well as characterising the planet's geology and past climate.

The delta it is exploring formed 3.5 billion years ago. The rover is currently there investigating sedimentary rocks, which came about from particles of various sizes settling in the then watery environment.

World stocks

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"The market is looking weak this morning because of the FedEx warning, but it really goes beyond that," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

"There are pressing concerns that the aggressive rate hikes by central banks thus far, and the ones that are yet to come, will drive the global economy into a recession that is not 'soft'," O'Hare said.

The Dow was down 1.1 percent in late morning trading, while the broader S&P 500 fell 1.3 percent and the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite tumbled 1.6 percent.

"These increasing concerns over a global recession, as well as rising US yields are prompting a flight into the US dollar and not much else," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.

Fiji to hire more workers

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general and minister for economy, as saying that there is a huge shortage of workers in fields such as brick and tile layers.

Recently, state-owned recruiting agency Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) in a circular asked for the recruitment of 10 workers in Fiji in different categories, including senior technician, mason, and construction foreman.

The wage for the workers is at least six Fijian dollars per hour and the initial job contract is for two years, which is renewable, the circular said.

The employer will pay the return airfare once the job contract ends, it added.

Salauddin said a new migrant worker can earn about 1,000 Fijian dollars a month which is about Tk 40,000.

In July this year, Bangladeshi expatriates launched the Bangladesh Fiji Association with more than 300 Bangladeshis attending the ceremony at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, says a news report of Fiji Times.

Xi, Putin contest

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outside the West, slamming what he called "instruments of protectionism, illegal sanctions and economic selfishness".

"The growing role of new centres of power who cooperate with each other... is becoming more and more clear," Putin said.

The summit has been Putin's first major international outing since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February, sparking a conflict that has left thousands dead and seen Russia hit with waves of economic sanctions.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on leaders of the bloc to address energy and food crises sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, reports Reuters.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mohammed Sufiur Rahman, Bangladesh high commissioner to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, said the ceremony was a historic and proud moment for all Bangladeshis and an important one for both countries.

At the programme, Fijian Defence Minister Inia Seruiratu said his government would continue to do their best to provide a friendly environment for all Bangladeshi workers and citizens in the country, the report says.

At present, nearly 5,000 foreign workers are legally employed in Fiji and more than half of them are Bangladeshis, according to the Bangladesh mission, which cited unofficial statistics.

An archipelago with nearly 300 small and large islands, Fiji is a middle-income country of nearly 0.9 million population and a per capita income of \$5,057 (Tk 5,28,336 approximately), the mission said in its website.

He told Putin that now is not a time for war, with food, fertiliser and fuel security among the major concerns of the world at present. The Russian president said he wanted the conflict in Ukraine to end as soon as possible, but that Ukraine was set on achieving its objectives on the battlefield.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also told leaders at the summit that efforts were being made "to finalise the conflict in Ukraine through diplomacy as soon as possible".

For Xi, the summit was an opportunity to shore up his credentials as a global statesman ahead of a pivotal congress of the ruling Communist Party in October, where he is widely expected to secure an unprecedented third term as president.

Do more to cut its access

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It also highlights that such measures must respect human rights and that efforts must be made to mitigate foreseeable socio-economic impacts. Several countries continue to supply weaponry and engage in military cooperation, the report said.

Since seizing control of state organs in early 2021, the so-called State Administration Council has "failed to govern in meaningful and sustainable ways, instead continuing to repress and terrorise the Myanmar people," the report says.

While some progress has been made on the FFM's recommendations to economically isolate the Myanmar military, there remain significant gaps, which are ever more important following the coup.

"Targeted measures should

particularly focus on the military's foreign currency access," said the report.

It urges the international community to step up efforts to support the people of Myanmar and to ensure the military's financial isolation in a coordinated fashion.

Appropriate sanctions should be implemented in consultation with civil society and the democratic movement, including trade unions and the National Unity Government, to calibrate their impact, the report said.

It mentioned that Myanmar's military authorities are clearly prioritising its military campaigns over the welfare of the population and economic recovery.

In comparison with the previous annual government budget, the

military authorities' 2022/23 budget increased defence spending, while reducing allocations to education, health, and social welfare.

Poverty in Myanmar has increased at least twofold and the public health system has effectively broken down since the coup, and more than half of all school-age children have not had access to education for two academic years, the report said.

It also reported that some states and companies continue business relationships with military-owned enterprises in a number of sectors.

All businesses active in Myanmar or sourcing from the country should take steps to ensure they do not economically benefit the military, including by conducting ongoing and transparent heightened human rights due diligence, the report added.

All challenges not addressed

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Munira Khan, former president of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), echoed Sakhawat's view saying the EC mentioned very conventional challenges. She said more challenges will emerge with the election drawing nearer.

Unveiling its work plan for the 12th national polls on Wednesday, the EC set the target of holding the election by January 29, 2024. It also stressed the need for building confidence in political parties on the use of EVMs, to be used in not more than 150 electoral constituencies.

According to the EC, 17 political parties during their talks with the commission opined in favor of the use of EVMs. However, The Daily Star found that at least four of them actually spoke against it.

Experts said the commission has tried to justify the use of EVMs although almost all opposition parties were against it.

"The Election Commission tried to justify the use of EVM, but did

not talk about capturing of polling booths having EVMs. They talked about CCTVs, but did not mention whether those will be installed in every polling centre, every booth, and how those will be monitored," Sakhawat said.

Munira said it seems that voters of 150 constituencies would be "deprived of free and fair polling".

"Some voters will have the so-called advantage of using EVMs while the others won't. Can we then be able to term it a free and fair election?"

Mentioning that the whole world is facing an economic crisis, she suggested the EC refrain from incurring additional expenses for the use of EVMs.

"From now on, the Election Commission should think about holding the next general election with ballots. It will be good for the country's economy."

Munira also said, "I am not sure why the commission is attaching so much importance to this although many people and political parties

have distrust in the system."

The EC said gaining the trust of political parties is a major challenge to holding a free and fair election. But experts said the commission's definition of "participatory election" is unacceptable.

"It is true that the commission cannot force any political party to join the polls, but they [EC] can't say this. I don't know why they said so. It is probably that I am not bothered about who is joining the polls or boycotting. If it is the commission's intention, then how will they hold an inclusive election?" questioned former election commissioner Sakhawat.

According to Munira, the EC's focus should not be only on political parties, but on all stakeholders, including voters.

"The Election Commission should create such an environment that political parties and voters feel comfortable. The commission should have detailed the definition of participatory election."