### Three killed in attack on China hotel in Kabul

#### 2 foreigners hurt

AFP, Kabul

At least three people were killed when gunmen attacked a hotel popular with Chinese business people in the Afghan capital yesterday, with witnesses reporting multiple blasts and several bursts of gunfire.

Smoke could be seen pouring from the multistorey Kabul Longan Hotel as Taliban security forces rushed to the site and sealed off the neighbourhood.

The Taliban claim to have improved security since storming back to power in August last year but there have been scores of bomb blasts and attacks, many claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State

governmental organisation Emergency NGO, which operates a hospital just one kilometre from the blast site, said it had received 21 casualties, including three people dead on arrival.

It did not say if those dead were civilians or involved in the attack.

police Kabul spokesman said three attackers were killed and one suspect arrested, blaming the assault on "mischievous elements".

'All the guests of the hotel have been rescued and no foreigner was killed. Only two foreign guests were injured when they threw themselves from an upper storey," chief Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid added on Twitter.

Video circulating on social media showed people clamouring out of windows on the lower floors of the building, with the hotel sign -- in English and Chinese visible.

Other video showed huge flames licking out of another section, with thick plumes of smoke.

#### **EASING OF CURBS** China faces soaring Covid cases

AFP, Beijing

Covid cases are surging in the Chinese capital, officials said yesterday, as the country navigates a rapid turn away from its zero-tolerance coronavirus strategy.

Just a few days after China began loosening restrictions. Beijing authorities said more than 22,000 patients had visited hospitals across the city in the previous day -- 16 times the number a week ago.

"The current trend of the rapid spread of the epidemic in Beijing still exists," said city health commission spokesman Li Ang at a briefing yesterday.

"The number fever clinic visits and flu-like cases increased significantly, and the number of... emergency calls increased sharply."

China reported 8,626 infections vesterday but with testing no longer mandatory for much of the population the number is believed to be a lot higher.

As the country steers a tricky path out of its zero-Covid policy towards living with the virus, many with symptoms have opted to self-medicate at home.

Cold and fever medicines have sold out in virtually all pharmacies across Beijing, and rapid antigen tests are dwindling as people stock up in anticipation of a virus surge that threatens the lives of millions of

unvaccinated elderly. Social media users reported a surge of infections in smaller cities including Baoding in Hebei province and Dazhou in Sichuan.



People walk on a snow-covered pathway near the Tower Bridge, as cold weather continues in London, Britain, yesterday. Three boys aged eight, 10 and 11 have died and another boy remains in critical condition after they fell into an icy lake near Birmingham, central England, police said. The incident came as the UK was hit by heavy snow and freezing conditions, causing major travel disruption, on the eve of a national rail strike today.

# Sr US delegation visits China

### Discusses ways to improve ties, issue of Taiwan with their counterparts

A senior US delegation in China discussed wavs to improve ties and the issue of Taiwan with their local counterparts, Beijing said yesterday, as they laid the groundwork for a planned visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The talks -- involving top US diplomat for East Asia Daniel Kritenbrink, National Security Council Senior Director for China and Taiwan Laura Rosenberger, and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng -- took place on Sunday and yesterday in the northern province of Hebei,

The visit comes after Chinese leader Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden pledged to repair frayed relations at a summit in Bali, Indonesia last month.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said yesterday that the two sides in Hebei "had in-depth discussions on implementing the consensus reached at the Bali Summit between the two presidents".

Wang said the meeting also touched on

China claims as its territory and an increasing source of friction between Beijing and

Xie, Kritenbrink and Rosenberger spoke on "strengthening exchanges at all levels" and



"agreed to maintain communication", Wang

The State Department said last week that the visit would lay the groundwork for Secretary of State Blinken's visit to China in early 2023, the

Taiwan, the self-ruled democratic island that first visit by the top US diplomat in four years. Relations have soured between the United States and China in recent years over a litany of issues, from human rights to trade and technology.

In their Bali meeting, Xi and Biden discussed contentious issues, including Taiwan's future, US restrictions on Chinese high-tech imports and Beijing's moves to expand its influence around the world.

Biden left the meeting proclaiming that there need not be a new Cold War, while Xi told Biden the two countries "share more, not less, common interests".

Meanwhile, the Chinese foreign ministry said yesterday that US sanctions on two senior Chinese officials over alleged human rights abuses in Tibet were illegal and seriously harmed Sino-US ties.

China rejects accusations that it has used harsh policies to quell ethnic dissent and control religious activities in the rugged Himalayan region of Tibet.

#### **ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS**

## Iran carries out 2nd execution

EU to impose more sanctions on Tehran

**REUTERS**, Dubai

The Islamic Republic vesterday hanged a man in public who state media said had been convicted of killing two members of the security forces, the second execution in less than a week of people involved in protests against Iran's ruling theocracy. Nationwide unrest erupted three months ago after the death while in detention of 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, who was arrested by morality police enforcing the Islamic Republic's mandatory dress code laws. The demonstrations have turned into a popular revolt by furious Iranians from all layers of society, posing one of the worst legitimacy challenges to the Shia clerical elite since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. "Majid Reza Rahnavard was hanged in public in (the holy Shia city of) Mashhad this morning ... He was sentenced to death for 'waging war against God' after stabbing to death two members of the security forces," the judiciary's Mizan news agency reported. Mizan published pictures of the execution at dawn, showing Rahnavard hanging from a construction crane, with his hands and feet bound and his head covered with a black bag. The European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said yesterday the EU will agree on a "very tough" package of sanctions against Iran to show its support for peaceful protesters.

### **WEST BANK RAID** Israeli troops kill Palestinian girl

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli forces shot and killed a 16 year-old Palestinian girl during a raid in the volatile city of Jenin yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, as the wave of violence in the

occupied West Bank this year continued. The Israeli military said it was aware of reports of the girl's death and the incident was under review. It said troops were shot at while carrying out a raid to arrest three wanted individuals and returned fire. Jenin, in the northern West Bank, houses a sprawling refugee camp in which

armed militant groups including Islamic Jihad and Hamas operate openly. Along with the nearby city of Nablus, it has been at the centre of much of the violence in the West Bank this year.



Firefighters work at a local market hit by shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Russiancontrolled Ukraine, yesterday.

# US scientists make crucial breakthrough

FROM PAGE 12

achieve the same goal.

The National Ignition Facility project creates energy from nuclear fusion by what's known as "thermonuclear inertial fusion." In practice, US scientists fire pellets that contain hydrogen fuel into an array of nearly 200 lasers, essentially creating a series of extremely fast, repeated explosions at the rate of 50 times per

The energy collected from the neutrons and alpha particles is extracted as heat, and that heat holds the key to producing energy.

"They contain the fusion reaction by bombarding the outside with lasers, Tony Roulstone, a fusion expert from the University of Cambridge's Department of Engineering, told CNN. "They heat up the outside; that creates a shockwave.

Even though getting a net energy gain from nuclear fusion is a big deal, it's happening on a much smaller scale than what's needed to power

electric grids and heat buildings. "It's about what it takes to boil

10 kettles of water," said Jeremy Chittenden, co-director of the Centre for Inertial Fusion Studies at Imperial College in London. "In order to turn that into a power station, we need to make a larger gain in energy - we need it to be substantially more."

In the UK, scientists are working with a huge doughnut-shaped machine outfitted with giant magnets called a tokamak to try to generate the same result. The missing mass converts to an enormous amount of energy. The neutrons, which are able to escape the plasma, then hit a "blanket" lining the walls of the tokamak and their kinetic energy transfers as heat. This heat can then be used to warm water, create steam power turbines to generate

The machine that generates the reaction has to undergo serious heat. The plasma needs to reach at least 150 million degrees Celsius, 10 times hotter than the core of the sun.

Scientists working near Oxford were last year able to generate a record-breaking amount of sustained tremendously exciting."

energy. Even so, it only lasted 5 seconds.

Whether it's using magnets or shooting pellets with lasers, the result is ultimately the same: Heat sustained by the process of fusing the atoms together holds the key to helping produce energy.

The big challenge of harnessing fusion energy is sustaining it long enough so that it can power electric grids and heating systems around the

Chittenden and Roulstone told CNN that scientists around the globe now must work toward dramatically scaling up their fusion projects, and also bringing the cost down. Getting it commercially viable will take years of more research.

"At the moment we're spending a huge amount of time and money for every experiment we do," Chittenden said. "We need to bring the cost down by a huge factor.'

However, Chittenden called this new chapter in nuclear fusion "a true breakthrough moment which is

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