

EU imposes new Myanmar sanctions

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday imposed asset freezes and visa bans on Myanmar's energy minister, influential businessmen and high-ranking military officers, over an ongoing crackdown on opponents two years after a coup.

The new batch of European Union sanctions hit nine individuals and seven entities tied to the ruling regime.

The move by the 27-nation bloc followed similar sanctions from the US and Britain around the second anniversary of the military coup that launched a violent campaign against democracy activists.

PROTECTION OF SEAS UN to try anew to finish treaty

AFP, United Nations

UN member states yesterday opened two weeks of negotiations aimed at finally reaching a treaty meant to protect and preserve vast areas of the world's oceans.

After more than 15 years of formal and informal talks, this will be the third time in less than a year that negotiators converge on New York in what, yet again, is supposed to be a final and conclusive round.

But on the eve of the talks, set to run through March 3, cautious optimism appears to be taking hold, encouraged by a historic agreement reached in Montreal in December during the UN's COP15 conference on biodiversity.

Countries then committed themselves to protecting 30 percent of the world's lands and seas by 2030. "We're optimistic the COP15 biodiversity agreement will provide the shot in the arm needed for governments to get this important agreement over the line," Pepe Clarke, Oceans Practice Leader for WWF International, said.



Ukrainian honour guard walks past the Wall of Remembrance for the Deceased for Ukraine as US president visits Ukrainian president for a meeting in Kyiv yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

REPORT OF GUNFIRE Main Afghan-Pak border crossing closed

REUTERS, Kabul

Taliban authorities have closed the main border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, an Afghan official said yesterday, and residents in the area reported the sound of gunfire near the normally bustling border transit point.

A Taliban provincial information official said the Torkham border crossing was closed for all trade and travellers. Disputes linked to the 2,600 km border have been a bone of contention between the neighbours for decades.

Indian EC should be dissolved Says Shiv Sena President Uddhav Thackeray

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A key regional party of India yesterday demanded the Election Commission "should be dissolved" and said election commissioners should be elected by the people, two days after losing the name and symbol of the Shiv Sena, the party founded by his father Bal Thackeray. The remarks by Shiv Sena President and former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray at a press conference in Mumbai came days after the Election Commission allotted the 'bow and arrow' symbol and Shiv Sena name to Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde's faction of the party saying the latter is the "real Shiv Sena." Uddhav alleged there a pre-planned conspiracy to steal Shiv Sena's name and symbol. "There is not a single instance where the party name and symbol were directly given to one faction," he said.

OCCUPIED WEST BANK Israel won't authorise new settlements

Netanyahu's office tells US; UNSC dismayed by Israel's settlement plan

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel will not authorise new settlements in the occupied West Bank in the coming months, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said yesterday.

Netanyahu's religious-nationalist coalition on February 12 granted retroactive authorisation to nine settler outposts that had been erected without government approval, angering the Palestinians, who want the West Bank for a future state.

The move also drew condemnation from Western powers and Israel's Arab partners, who deem all the settlements illegal.

But the United Arab Emirates told the UN Security Council it would not call a vote on a draft resolution against the settlements. Citing "positive talks between the partners", UAE said the council would instead issue a unanimous statement.

Meanwhile, The UN Security Council issued a formal statement yesterday expressing "deep concern and dismay" with Israel's February 12 announcement of further construction and expansion of settlements on occupied



Palestinian territory.

"The Security Council reiterates that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines," the 15-member council said in the presidential statement agreed by consensus.

Israel has sponsored some 140 settlements in the West Bank, which it sees as a historical birthright and a security bulwark, while dismantling or turning a blind eye to dozens of outposts.

"Israel informed the United States that, in the coming months, it will not authorise new settlements beyond the nine already approved," said the statement from Netanyahu's office.

On Saturday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Netanyahu and separately with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, reaffirming US support for a "two-state solution" in the region and asking the two to "restore calm."

Blinken spoke by telephone with both men to reaffirm US commitment to "a negotiated two-state solution and opposition to policies that endanger its viability," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

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It is the United States and not China that is endlessly shipping weapons to the battlefield.
China's foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin rejects US claim it may arm Russia

LANDSLIDES At least 36 killed in Brazil

AFP, Sao Paulo

Flooding and landslides triggered by torrential rain in Brazil claimed at least 36 lives on Carnival weekend in southeast Sao Paulo state, authorities said Sunday.

TV and social media footage from the town of Sao Sebastiao showed entire neighborhoods under water, debris from hillside houses swept away by oozing earth, flooded highways and cars destroyed by fallen trees, among other damage.

At least 35 people died in Sao Sebastiao, the state government said. A girl was also killed in the town of Ubatuba, news reports said.

"Unfortunately, we are going to have many more deaths," the state civil defense chief, Henguel Pereira, told the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo.

Another 228 people were left homeless and 338 were evacuated in the coastal region north of the city of Sao Paulo, the state government said earlier, as rescue crews raced to help those hit by the storm.

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