

Bomb attack kills guard in Afghan city Eight injured

REUTERS, Kabul

A blast hit a cultural centre during an event for journalists in northern Afghanistan yesterday, killing at least one security guard and wounding eight, according to authorities and journalists, a few days after the province's governor died in an explosion claimed by Islamic State.

"Today, at 11:30 am an explosion occurred at the Tabyan Cultural Centre, in the second police district of Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh province ... the explosion happened due to a mine," said Abdul Nafi Takor, spokesperson for the Taliban administration's Ministry of Interior.

Takor added that five journalists and three children were among the injured and a security guard was killed. It was not immediately clear who was behind the explosion.



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida offers flowers at the memorial ceremony to mark the 12th anniversary of 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, in Fukushima, Japan yesterday. A minute's silence was observed nationwide at 2:46 pm, the precise moment when a 9.0-magnitude quake devastated northeastern Japan 12 years ago. PHOTO: AFP

China appoints Li Qiang as premier

AFP, Beijing



Li Qiang, one of Chinese President Xi Jinping's most trusted allies, was confirmed as premier yesterday, as Xi cements his influence on the country's top leadership.

Li, the former Shanghai party chief who oversaw the city's gruelling two-month lockdown last spring, was named the successor of outgoing premier

Li Keqiang at a meeting of the country's rubber stamp parliament.

The 63-year-old received nearly every vote from the more than 2,900 delegates at the National People's Congress, a day after Xi was unanimously selected by deputies for a norm-breaking third term as president.

Xi's motion nominating Li Qiang as premier was read out to the chamber yesterday morning.

Journalists were asked to leave the chamber as deputies, mostly dressed in dark suits, marked their ballots in a tightly choreographed process.

Delegates later applauded as Xi ceremoniously deposited his votes in the ballot box while cheerful traditional music played from speakers.

An electronic screen in the hall displayed 2,936 votes for Li, with only three delegates voting against his appointment and eight abstaining.

Li later took an oath, swearing to be loyal to China's constitution and to "work hard to build a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and great modern socialist country".

Bakhmut now a 'killing zone'

Says UK as Russians face Ukrainian counter-offensive

AGENCIES

Bakhmut has become a "killing zone" that is probably highly challenging for Russia's Wagner mercenary forces trying to continue their assault westward, the UK Ministry of Defence said yesterday.

Its latest intelligence update said that over the past four days, Wagner Group forces had taken control of most of eastern Bakhmut, while Ukrainian forces held its west and had demolished key bridges over the Bakhmutka River, "which now marks the front line".

The ministry said: "With Ukrainian units able to fire from fortified buildings to the west, this area has become a killing zone, likely making it highly challenging for Wagner forces attempting to continue their frontal assault westwards."

Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, meanwhile, said his Wagner private army had opened recruitment centres in 42 cities as he seeks to replenish its ranks after heavy losses in fighting for Bakhmut, reports Reuters.

In an upbeat audio message on Friday, Prigozhin said new fighters were coming forward but gave no indication of the numbers involved. He also said ammunition supplies had improved, but remained a concern.

"In spite of the colossal resistance of the Ukrainian armed forces, we will go forward," he said. "Despite the sticks in the wheels that are thrown at us at every step, we will overcome this together."

Wagner has led some of the fiercest fighting in Russia's attempt to take Bakhmut, where the Ukrainian army is still holding out after more than seven months of attritional warfare - a bloody campaign that Prigozhin calls "the meat grinder".

In a separate post on social media on Friday Prigozhin said Ukraine was preparing a counteroffensive near Bakhmut, adding: "Of course we are doing everything we can to prevent this from happening."

In another audio message on Friday, Prigozhin said he had thanked the government for a "heroic" increase in production of ammunition but said he was still worried about shortages for his fighters and the Russian army as a whole. He said ammunition was now being produced "in huge quantities, which cover all the necessary needs".

China role in Saudi, Iran deal a tricky test for US

REUTERS, Washington

The surprise deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic ties offers much for the United States to be intrigued about, including a possible path to rein in Tehran's nuclear program and a chance to cement a ceasefire in Yemen.

It also contains an element sure to make officials in Washington deeply uneasy - the role of China as peace broker in a region where the US has long wielded influence.

The deal was announced after four days of previously undisclosed talks in Beijing between the Middle East rivals. White House spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday that while Washington was not directly involved, Saudi Arabia kept US officials informed of the talks with Iran.

Relations between the US and China have become highly contentious over issues ranging from trade to espionage and increasingly the two powers compete for influence in parts of the world far from their own borders.

Kirby appeared to downplay China's involvement in Friday's development, saying the White House believes internal and external pressure, including effective Saudi deterrence against attacks from Iran or its proxies, ultimately brought Tehran to the table.

But former senior US and UN official Jeffrey Feltman said China's role, rather than the re-opening of embassies after six years, was the most significant aspect of the agreement.

"This will be interpreted - probably accurately - as a slap at the Biden administration and as evidence that China is the rising power," said Feltman, a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

The agreement comes as Iran accelerates its nuclear program after two years of failed US attempts to revive a 2015 deal that aimed to stop Tehran producing a nuclear bomb.

Brian Katulis, of the Middle East Institute, said that for the US and Israel the agreement offers a "new possible pathway" for reviving stalled talks on the Iran nuclear issue, with a potential partner in Riyadh.



It also offers hope for more durable peace in Yemen, where a conflict sparked in 2014 has widely been seen as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

China's involvement in brokering the deal could have "significant implications" for Washington, said Daniel Russel, the top US diplomat for East Asia under former President Barack Obama.

Russel said it was unusual for China to act on its own to help broker a diplomatic deal in a dispute to which it was not a party.

"The question is, whether this is the shape of things to come?" he

said. "Could it be a precursor to a Chinese mediation effort between Russia and Ukraine when Xi visits Moscow?"

When it comes to Iran, it is not clear that the results will be good for the US, said Naysan Rafati, senior Iran analyst at International Crisis Group.

"The drawback is that at a time when Washington and Western partners are increasing pressure against the Islamic Republic ... Tehran will believe it can break its isolation and, given the Chinese role, draw on major-power cover," said Rafati.

China's involvement has already drawn skepticism in Washington about Beijing's motives.

Republican Representative Michael McCaul, chairman of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, rejected China's portrayal of itself as peace-broker.

Kirby said the US was closely monitoring Beijing's behavior in the Middle East and elsewhere.

"As for Chinese influence there or in Africa or Latin America, it's not like we have blinders on," he said. "We certainly continue to watch China as they try to gain influence and footholds elsewhere around the world in their own selfish interests."

Still, Beijing's involvement adds to a perception of growing Chinese power and influence that contributes to a narrative of a shrinking US global presence, said Jon Alterman, of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies.

MIGRANTS ON BOATS 1,000 brought to safety at Italy ports

AFP, Rome

More than 1,000 migrants were brought to safety at two Italian ports after the overcrowded boats they were on encountered problems in the Mediterranean, the coastguard said yesterday. The rescues came the same day as a body was discovered of the 74th victim of the deadly shipwreck nearly two weeks ago - that of a female child between five and six years of age, according to news agency AGI. Coastguard videos showed a large fishing boat pitching violently back and forth in nighttime rough seas with dozens of people visible on the deck. Other images showed inflatable rescue boats approaching another fishing vessel packed with people.

Man killed in Bihar for possessing beef

REUTERS, New Delhi

Police in India have arrested three men in eastern Bihar state in connection with the death of a Muslim man who was attacked because he was suspected of carrying beef, a police official said yesterday. The victim, Naseem Qureshi, 56, died earlier this week after being attacked by a mob on suspicion of carrying beef, the sale and consumption of which is restricted in some parts of the country by local governments. Hardline Hindu groups have been demanding a complete ban on cow slaughter across India. Bihar is currently ruled by a regional party, and Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party sits in the opposition. In the latest incident in the state, the victim was allegedly surrounded by over twenty people and attacked, according to a police statement in court. Police intervened but Qureshi died on the way to the hospital, according to the statement. Ramchandra Tiwari, head of Rasulpur police station in Bihar, where the crime took place, said by phone that three people were arrested.



Police investigators inspect a shell crater left by a Russian military strike in a supermarket car park, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kherson, Ukraine yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS



"There is no doubt that the law on the registration of non-governmental organisations was used as an excuse to start, generally speaking, an attempt to change the government by force."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov denounces Georgia protests as coup attempt

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Corrigendum-2 for Tender Notice No. 28/2022-23

This is to notify for all concern that the Tender Notice No. 28/2022-23 invited vide Memo No. 46.02.0400.000.14.001.2023.364 Date: 16.02.2023 (Tender ID: 788556). Tender document last selling date & time will be 19.03.2023 & 16:00pm instead of 06.03.2023 & 16:00pm. This Notice will be stated as a part of the tender document. More information will be available at concern office. All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

Suprio Mukherjee
Executive Engineer
LGED, Barguna

GD-447