

Sudan spirals into 'destruction'

Says UN chief

AFP, Geneva

Sudan is descending into death and destruction at an unprecedented speed, UN chief Antonio Guterres said yesterday as he urged donors to step in and curb the unfolding catastrophe.

"The scale and speed of Sudan's descent into death and destruction is unprecedented," the United Nations secretary-general told a pledging conference.

"Without strong international support, Sudan could quickly become a locus of lawlessness, radiating insecurity across the region."

The UN has two appeals for tackling the crisis – the humanitarian response within Sudan, and the refugee response outside its borders. The appeals need \$3 billion this year, but are less than 17 percent funded so far. At the conference, Qatar pledged \$50 million and Germany \$200 million in Sudan aid.



An explosive charge left by Palestinians detonates by an Israeli armoured vehicle during an Israeli army raid in Jenin in the occupied West Bank yesterday. Israeli forces killed five Palestinians including a militant yesterday, in the raid that saw seven Israeli security personnel wounded and rare helicopter fire.

PHOTO: AFP

GRAFT CASE

Ex-Pakistan PM gets bail extended again

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's bail on corruption charges was extended again yesterday, after he urged supporters to take to the streets if he is re-arrested.

Khan's brief detention last month on graft charges sparked days of deadly violence as his followers rampaged through cities, setting fire to buildings and clashing with police.

He was freed from custody after the Supreme Court declared the arrest illegal, but he says the government still plans to detain him to quash his momentum ahead of elections due by October.

"They believe that people will sit as silent spectators when they put me in jail," the 70-year-old said in a live-streamed address late Sunday night.

"Death is much better than subjugation. Make up your minds against fear. You have to stand up, peaceful protest is your right," he said.

Yesterday, a special corruption court in Islamabad extended bail for Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi until July 4. He was also bailed in 15 other cases before three courts, said a member of his legal team.

RARE BEIJING TALKS

Xi, Blinken agree to stabilise US-China ties

AGENCIES

China and the United States yesterday agreed to try and stabilise their intense rivalry to avoid veering into conflict, but did not announce any major breakthroughs during a rare visit to Beijing by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Chinese President Xi Jinping hailed "progress" after shaking hands with Blinken at the Great Hall of the People, a grand venue usually reserved for greeting heads of state.

Blinken, the first holder of his post to meet the Chinese leader since 2018, told reporters he had raised contentious issues such as Taiwan, the democratic island Beijing claims as its own.

And while he said the two sides had not moved forward on establishing regular military-to-military communications - a major concern for the wider world - he expected more senior US officials would visit China in coming weeks.

It had been hoped their roughly 30-minute meeting could help facilitate a summit between Xi and US President Joe Biden later in the year, reports Reuters.

"The two sides have also made progress and reached the agreement on some specific issues. This is very good," Xi told Blinken across a long table bedecked with pink lotus flowers.

Blinken responded by saying the two countries "have an obligation and responsibility" to manage their relationship and that the United

States was "committed to doing that".

His meetings in Beijing, including talks with China's top diplomat Wang Yi and foreign minister Qin Gang, had been "candid and constructive," he added.

It was not immediately clear from Xi's remarks what progress he was referring to, although he told Blinken China "hopes to see a sound and steady China-US relationship" and believes that the two countries "can overcome various difficulties", according to Chinese readout of the talks.

Blinken repeated that US does not support independence of Taiwan and stood by its stance of maintaining status quo.

He also urged the US not to "hurt China's legitimate rights and interests", a signal of potential flashpoints such as Taiwan.

Blinken repeated that the United States does not support the independence of Taiwan and stood by its stance of maintaining the status quo, reports AFP.

"At the same time, we and many others have deep concerns about some of the provocative actions that China has taken in recent years going back to 2016," he said.

Xi's comments, and the

diplomatic choreography of the visit, appeared to signal a will to make progress, analysts said.

"China's messaging has been pretty positive," said Wu Xinbo, a professor and director at the Center for American Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

"China showed that it still hopes to work with the US to stabilise and improve relations. I think that while China is not optimistic about Sino-US relations, it has not given up hope either."

Earlier yesterday, Blinken underscored the importance of open communication channels to manage their competition during more than three hours of talks with Wang, which the State Department called "productive".

Describing the US-China relationship as being at a low point, Wang said the root cause was the United States' wrong perception of China.

"We must take a responsible attitude toward the people, history and the world, and reverse the downward spiral of US-China relations," Wang said during the meeting with Blinken, according to a statement released by China's foreign ministry.

Blinken's trip, which was postponed in February after a suspected Chinese spy balloon flew over US airspace, was closely followed worldwide as further deterioration of ties could have global implications on financial markets, trade practices and routes and supply chains.

Thais justify talks with Myanmar junta

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand yesterday justified hosting talks aimed at re-engaging with Myanmar's shunned military, saying dialogue was necessary to protect its border with the strife-torn country, even as key Southeast Asian neighbours stayed away.

Myanmar's generals have been barred from high level meetings of the 10-member Association of Southeast Nations (Asean) since they seized power in a 2021 coup and unleashed violence on those who challenged their takeover.

But Thailand's outgoing military-backed government invited Asean foreign ministers, including the one appointed by Myanmar's junta, to discuss a proposal for the bloc to "fully re-engage Myanmar at the leaders' level", according to an invitation seen by Reuters and verified by sources.

Critics see the meeting as undermining a unified Asean approach to the crisis in Myanmar but Thai PM Prayuth Chan-ocha said talks were necessary to protect his country, which shares a long border with Myanmar. Thailand's foreign minister said earlier that Myanmar's crisis was sending refugees across the border into Thailand and it had hit trade hard.

8 villages retaken in two weeks

Says Ukraine amid front-line battles with Russia

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukraine confirmed yesterday it had driven Russian forces from an eighth village in its two-week-old counteroffensive in a heavily fortified part of the front line on the most direct route to the country's Azov Sea coast.

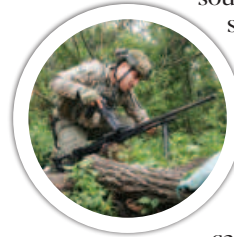
A Russian-installed official said on Sunday that Ukraine had taken control of the village, Piatykhatky, in the southern Zaporizhzhia region. He later said Moscow had pushed them out and yesterday morning he said Ukraine was attacking again.

Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said Ukrainian forces had not only retaken Piatykhatky but had advanced by up to seven km (4.3 miles) into Russian lines in two weeks, capturing 113 square km of land.

"In the course of two weeks of offensive operations in the Berdiansk and Melitopol directions, eight settlements were liberated," Maliar said on Telegram, referring to two cities on the Russian-occupied coastline.

The reported capture of the villages reflects incremental gains for Ukraine that highlight the challenge of breaking through lines Moscow has spent months strengthening. Piatykhatky is significant, however, as lies around 90 km from the coast.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy hailed the efforts of the troops and said he would continue talks with Western allies to get weapons and ammunition supplies to them as soon as possible.



UN to finally adopt high seas treaty

AFP, United Nations

The world's first international treaty to protect the high seas was due to be adopted at the United Nations yesterday, a historic environmental accord designed to protect remote ecosystems vital to mankind. "It will be a huge accomplishment, one that we've already celebrated with the finalization of the text in March. But the adoption formalizes that, and really sets the pathway for the next steps," Liz Karan, of the NGO Pew Charitable Trusts, told AFP. The landmark treaty will establish a legal framework to extend swathes of environmental protections to international waters. Following more than 15 years of discussions, including four years of formal negotiations, UN member states finally agreed on the text for the treaty in March after a flurry of final, marathon talks.

Modi heads to US for landmark visit

REUTERS, New Delhi



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi heads to the United States this week for a visit billed as a turning point for bilateral relations, with deeper cooperation in defence industry and sharing high technology in sharp focus. The visit is expected to give India access to critical American technologies Washington rarely shares with non-allies, strengthening a new bond that is underpinned by not just global politics but also business and economics. Washington and New Delhi, whose relationship was marked by mutual suspicion during the Cold War, have been moving closer for over two decades now with successive US presidents displaying bipartisan support for stronger ties with the emerging Asian economy.

WMO CLIMATE REPORT

Europe world's fastest warming continent

AFP, Paris

Europe should brace for more deadly heatwaves driven by climate change, said a sweeping report yesterday, noting the world's fastest-warming continent was some 2.3 degrees Celsius hotter last year than in pre-industrial times.

Crop-withering drought, record sea surface temperatures and unprecedented glacier melt are among the consequences laid out in a report by the World Meteorological Organization and the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The continent, which has been warming twice the global average since the 1980s, saw its warmest summer on record last year, with countries including France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom experiencing their warmest year on record.

The world has warmed an average of nearly 1.2C since the mid-1800s, unleashing a devastating cascade of extreme weather, including more intense heatwaves, more severe droughts in some areas and storms made more ferocious by rising seas.

Hardest hit are the most vulnerable people and world's poorest countries, who have done little to contribute to fossil fuel emissions that drive up temperatures.

In Europe, high temperatures "exacerbated severe and widespread drought conditions, fuelled violent wildfires that resulted in the second largest burnt area on record, and led to thousands of heat-associated excess deaths," said WMO chief Petteri Taalas.



This handout photo released by the Sri Lanka Navy yesterday, shows Indian naval submarine "INS Vagir" entering the Colombo harbour on a formal visit. The Indian High Commission in Colombo said the three-day visit is to commemorate the 9th International day of Yoga "under the theme of Global Ocean Ring."

PHOTO: AFP

Nepal capital bans Indian films

AFP, Kathmandu

The mayor of Nepal's capital yesterday launched a ban on the screening of hugely popular Indian films after a movie inspired by the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana sparked controversy.

Critics have taken issue with lines of dialogue in the film "Adipurush", which was released globally in Hindi and four other Indian languages on Friday.

The inspiration for the movie, the Ramayana, centres on King Rama's attempt to save his kidnapped wife Sita.

Sita was believed to have been born in Janakpur, a southern district of Nepal, but the film suggests she was born in India, triggering anger in Kathmandu.

Before the film's release, Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah warned it would not be screened if that section remained, and censors cut the offending dialogue for Nepali audiences.