

WEST BANK

US defunds science for Israeli univs

AFP, Washington

The US said Monday it would stop funding scientific research with Israeli academic institutions in West Bank, taking a new step away from validating the occupation of Palestinian territories.

The decision by Biden's administration reverses a move made under Donald Trump that rejected the wide international consensus that Israel illegally occupies the West Bank.

New guidance to US government agencies advises that "engaging in bilateral scientific and technological cooperation with Israel in geographic areas which came under the administration of Israel after 1967 and which remain subject to final-status negotiations is inconsistent with US foreign policy," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.



A man dressed as a clown entertains children ahead of Eid al-Adha in the port city of Sidon, Lebanon yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

EXILED EX-PM NAWAZ SHARIF

Pakistan passes law paving way for his return

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's national assembly has passed legislation limiting how long lawmakers can be disqualified from office, a state spokesman said yesterday, paving the way for exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's return to politics.

Sharif served as Pakistan's prime minister three times -- the last before being ousted over graft allegations in 2017. The Supreme Court barred him from politics for life and he was later sentenced to seven years in jail.

In 2019 he was granted medical bail and flew to Britain, where he has remained ever since, continuing to steer his PML-N party from behind the scenes.

His brother Shehbaz Sharif became prime minister last year, and the country is due to hold fresh general elections no later than October.

Yesterday, a government spokesman said the acting president had signed into law an amendment which says courts can only disqualify parliamentarians "for a period not exceeding five years".

The spokesman said senate chairman Sadiq Sanjrani served as acting president signing the bill on Monday, in absence of President Arif Alvi who is abroad on Hajj pilgrimage. "The ruling PML-N and its coalition partners want to bring Nawaz Sharif back," political analyst Hasan Askari told AFP.



Intercepted UK warplanes over Black Sea Says Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia's defence ministry said Monday it had scrambled two fighter jets as British warplanes approached its border above the Black Sea.

"As the Russian fighter jets approached, the foreign warplanes turned around and distanced themselves from the Russian border," the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said the planes involved were two British Typhoon jets accompanied by an RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft.

"The Russian planes safely returned to their airfield. There was no violation of the Russian border," said the ministry.

Incidents involving Russian and Western aircraft have multiplied over the Black Sea and Baltic Sea in recent months, as Moscow pursues its offensive in Ukraine.

In May, Moscow said it had intercepted four American strategic bombers above the Baltic Sea in two separate incidents in the space of one week.

Russia also scrambled warplanes to intercept French, German, and Polish aircraft.

In April, an American Reaper MQ-9 military drone crashed in the Black Sea after a confrontation Washington blamed on two Russian fighter jets.

Russia has started tactical fighter jet exercises over the Baltic Sea with the goal of testing readiness to perform combat and other special operations, the country's defence ministry has said.

"The main goal of exercise is to test the readiness of the flight crew to perform combat and special tasks as intended," Russia's defence ministry said yesterday.

Enough Senate support for top job

Thai PM front runner claims after his party won the most seats at last month's election

AFP, Bangkok

The front runner to become Thailand's next prime minister, Pita Limjaroenrat, said yesterday he had secured enough support from the Senate to take the top job.

Pita's progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most seats at last month's election as voters delivered a crushing rejection of military-linked parties that have run the kingdom for nearly a decade.

To become PM, Pita has to muster a majority across both houses, including the Senate, whose 250 members were handpicked by the last junta.

His eight-party coalition has a total of 312 seats in the lower house, but needs another 64 -- from either house -- for a majority.

Asked yesterday how many senators would endorse him, Pita told reporters at the parliament building: "Enough to make me become PM."

Thailand's parliament is set to sit next Monday for the first time since the election and a vote on the prime minister is due in mid-July.

MFP's determination to amend Thailand's tough laws against insulting the royal family has spooked the royalist-military conservative establishment.

Pita dismissed speculation that his party's stance on reforming royal defamation laws could be a barrier to forming a government.

Several senators have already said they will not vote for him as prime minister.

Earlier this month the election commission set up an investigation to look at whether Pita



was qualified to run for office, because of his alleged ownership of shares in a now-defunct media company.

Legislators are not allowed to own media shares.

MFP and fellow opposition outfit Pheu Thai dominated the May 14 election, in which voters roundly rejected Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, a former army chief who came to power in a 2014 coup.

The coalition has announced ambitious plans to rewrite the constitution -- scripted by Prayut's junta in 2017 -- as well as ending military conscription and allowing same-sex marriage.

The country's election commission last Monday certified the winners of all 500 seats of the lower house which must convene within early July to elect a speaker and two deputies. The speaker will then call for a joint session of parliament between the elected lower house and the appointed senate to vote on a new prime minister.

The alliance has control of 321 seats, still short of the 376 needed in the vote for the next premier. To elect Pita prime minister the alliance will have to must a majority of the 500 seats in the lower house and the 250 seats in the senate. The senators were appointed under military rule after a 2014 coup.

The Move Forward Party won the election on an anti-establishment platform that has put it on a collision course with conservatives royalist generals and old-money business elite that have long controlled Thai politics.

Sudan conflict worsening to 'alarming levels' in Darfur: UN

AFP, Geneva

The Sudan conflict is worsening to "alarming levels" in Darfur and taking on a worrying ethnic dimension, the United Nations said yesterday.

Darfur, a vast western region bordering Chad, has witnessed the deadliest violence since the conflict between rival armed forces broke out on April 15.

The army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has been battling the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, after the two fell out in a power struggle.

"We are particularly concerned about the worsening situation in West Darfur," Raouf Mazou, the UN refugee agency's assistant high commissioner for operations, told a briefing in Geneva.

"According to reports from colleagues on the ground, the conflict has reached alarming levels, making it virtually impossible to deliver life-saving aid to the affected populations.

"Increasing numbers of injured civilians are among the newly arrived refugees in Chad," including women and children.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING RAID

Philippines detains over 2,700 people

AFP, Manila

Philippine authorities have detained more than 2,700 people during a raid on several buildings in Manila where alleged trafficking victims were paid to recruit players for online games, police said yesterday. Chinese, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Singaporean, Malaysian, Pakistani, Cameroonian, Sudanese, Myanmar and Philippine nationals were among the people found inside a compound in the capital on Monday night. Authorities were interviewing 2,724 detainees to identify who was a victim or suspect, said police Captain Michelle Sabino, a spokeswoman for the anti-cybercrime unit.

Trump heard discussing secret docs on tape

AFP, Washington

Former US president Donald Trump can be heard discussing secret documents he had apparently held on to and acknowledging he had not declassified them in an audio recording aired by CNN. The two-minute recording comes from an interview Trump gave at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club in July 2021 for people working on a memoir by his former chief of staff Mark Meadows. Parts of a transcript of the recording were cited as evidence in special counsel Jack Smith's indictment of Trump on charges he had mishandled classified documents after leaving office.



US-INDIA STATEMENT

Pakistan summons US deputy mission chief

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's foreign ministry on Monday summoned the US embassy's deputy chief of mission to express concern over a statement last week by US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that called on Pakistan to ensure its territory was not used as a base for militant attacks.

The statement from the US and India was released after a meeting between the two countries' leaders at the White House on Friday and had received criticism from Pakistan, which called it contrary to diplomatic norms.

"It was stressed that the United States should refrain from issuing statements that may be construed as an encouragement of India's baseless and politically motivated narrative against Pakistan," Pakistan's foreign office said in a statement.

"It was also emphasized that counter-terrorism co-operation between Pakistan and the US had been progressing well and that an enabling environment, centred around trust and understanding, was imperative to further solidifying Pakistan-US ties."

US State Department spokesperson Matt Miller told reporters in a daily news briefing that Pakistan had taken important steps to counter terrorist groups, but said Washington advocated for more to be done.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been fraught for years. Since independence from Britain in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars.



A multi-purpose anti-dust truck sprays water for cooling on a street during hot weather conditions in Handan, in China's northern Hebei province yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

WHO warns Covid 'has not gone away'

AFP, Copenhagen

The World Health Organization's European office yesterday warned the risk of Covid-19 has not gone away, saying it was still responsible for nearly 1,000 deaths a week in the region.

The global health body on May 5 announced that the Covid-19 pandemic was no longer deemed a "global health emergency."

"Whilst it may not be a global public health emergency, however, Covid-19 has not gone away," WHO Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge told reporters. The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries.

"Close to 1,000 new Covid-19 deaths continue to occur across the region every week, and this is an underestimate due to a drop in countries regularly reporting Covid-19 deaths to WHO," Kluge added, and urged authorities to ensure vaccination coverage of at least 70 percent for vulnerable groups.