

Xi hails 'old friend' Kissinger

AFP, Beijing

Chinese leader Xi Jinping hailed former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger as an "old friend" as the two met in Beijing yesterday.

Kissinger's visit to China this week has seen him call for a rapprochement between Washington and Beijing, which remain at loggerheads over a range of issues, from human rights to trade and national security.

The 100-year-old diplomat was central to the United States establishing ties with communist China in the 1970s and has maintained close contact with the country's leaders over the years.

"Chinese people value friendship, and we will never forget our old friend and your historic contribution to promoting the development of China-US relations and enhancing the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples," President Xi told Kissinger on Thursday, according to state media.

"This not only benefited the two countries, but also changed the world," Xi added.



"The world is currently experiencing changes not seen in a century, and the international order is undergoing enormous change," the Chinese leader said.

"China and the United States are once more at a crossroads, and both sides must once again make a choice."

Kissinger, in response, thanked Xi for hosting him at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse's building number five — where he met with then premier Zhou Enlai in 1971.

"The relations between our two countries will be central to the peace in the world and to the progress of our societies," the former diplomat said.

Kissinger secretly flew to Beijing in 1971 on a mission to establish relations with communist China.

The trip set the stage for a landmark visit by former US president Richard Nixon, who sought both to shake up the Cold War and enlist help in ending the Vietnam War.

Washington's overtures to an isolated Beijing contributed to China's rise to become a manufacturing powerhouse and the world's second-largest economy.



Rescuers work at a site of a building heavily damaged by a Russian missile attack, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in central Odesa, Ukraine yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

16 killed in Maharashtra landslide Dozens missing

REUTERS, Irshahwadi

Rescue workers in India battled difficult terrain and bad weather yesterday as they searched for more than 100 people feared trapped in a landslide that killed at least 16 villagers after incessant rain soaked a mountain slope, officials said.

A wave of extreme heat, wildfires, torrential rain and flooding has wreaked havoc around the world in recent days, raising new fears about the pace of climate change.

The land collapsed in the middle of the night in the remote mountain hamlet of Irshahwadi, in the western state of Maharashtra, about 60 km (37 miles) from Mumbai, officials said.

Sixteen bodies had been recovered and more than 80 people had been rescued.

It was estimated that at least 225 people lived in the hamlet, the state's deputy chief minister, Devendra Fadnis, told the state assembly. More than 100 of them were feared trapped in the debris.

Rescue workers are having to trek in with their equipment for almost two hours to reach the landslide, some accompanied by sniffer dogs.

They then have to labour in heavy rain and fog, occasionally dodging big boulders tumbling down the slope, in their search for survivors nearly 12 hours after the disaster, a Reuters witness and media reported.

"The debris at some of the places is 10 to 29 feet deep," S B Singh, an official with the National Disaster Response Force, told the Indian Express newspaper.

"It is difficult to bring in heavy machinery to this place," he said.

More than 40 nations interested in joining BRICS Says South Africa

REUTERS, Johannesburg

More than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining the BRICS group of nations, South Africa's top diplomat in charge of relations with the bloc said yesterday.

Anil Sooklal and officials from the department of foreign affairs were addressing journalists in the main commercial city of Johannesburg, a day after South Africa confirmed Russia's Vladimir Putin would not attend the BRICS summit due to take place on August 22-24.

The question of how far and fast to expand the club — centred around Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — is top of the agenda at the summit of nations seeking to offset the perceived hegemony of the US-led West in global affairs.

Aside from the 22 countries that had formally asked to join, Sooklal said there was "an equal number of countries that have informally expressed interest in becoming BRICS members ... (including) all the major global south countries."

South African officials want BRICS to become a champion of the developing world, and Argentina, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Gabon, and Kazakhstan have all expressed interest.

South Africa had faced a dilemma in

hosting the summit. As a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which issued a warrant against Putin in March, it would be obliged to arrest the Russian president if he attended for alleged war crimes by Russia during its invasion of Ukraine, charges Putin denies.

But on Wednesday the host confirmed Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov would be attending in his president's place.

South Africa has come under fire from Western countries for what they see as an overly friendly stance towards Russia, a longstanding ally of the governing African National Congress (ANC) since it was a liberation movement fighting white minority rule. South Africa maintains it has a neutral stance on the Ukraine war, which it wants to end through negotiation.

Diplomats addressing the press yesterday said that position had been vindicated by South Africa's acceptance by both sides as a mediator in the conflict, in contrast to sabre-rattling by Western powers.

Russia listened to but did not ultimately accept a peace plan put forward by President Cyril Ramaphosa and other African leaders last month.

"Has condemnation, isolation brought us closer to peace? No," Zaheer Laher, South Africa's acting director general for global governance said. "But engagement would bring the parties closer to negotiation."



Modi calls alleged Manipur sexual assault 'shameful' Promises tough action

REUTERS, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday condemned the alleged sexual assault of women in Manipur state as "shameful" and promised tough action, his first comments on ethnic clashes in the remote northeast which have killed at least 125 people.

The violence began on May 3 after a court ordered the state government to consider extending special economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education enjoyed by the tribal Kuki people to the majority Meitei population as well.

Modi, who had not made any public remarks about the trouble in a state ruled by his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), spoke a day after videos showing women being molested in Manipur surfaced and sparked national outrage.

The videos on social media purport to show two women paraded naked and assaulted on a street before what townspeople on the videos say was a gang rape.

Reuters could not immediately verify the authenticity of the videos.

"My heart is filled with pain, it is filled with anger," Modi said at the end of customary comments he makes before the start of each session of parliament. "The incident from Manipur that has come to the fore, it is shameful for any civil society."

"The law will take its strongest steps, with all its might. What happened to the daughters of Manipur can never be forgiven," he said and urged chief ministers of all states to strengthen law enforcement.

Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh tweeted that state police have made the first arrest.

EU imposes more sanctions on Myanmar officials, entities

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union yesterday imposed a seventh round of sanctions on Myanmar in response to what it said was the escalation of violence and human rights violations since the 2021 military coup that overthrew elected leader Aung Suu Kyi.

The new sanctions target six persons and one entity, including the ministers for immigration and population, labour, and health and sports, the EU said in a statement.

"Restrictive measures currently apply to a total of 99 individuals and 19 entities. Those designated are subject to an asset freeze and a travel ban, which prevents them from entering or transiting through EU territory," it added.

"In addition, EU persons and entities are prohibited to make funds available to those listed."

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup, with a resistance movement fighting the military on multiple fronts after a bloody crackdown on opponents that saw Western sanctions reimposed.

Two killed in Auckland shooting

AFP, Auckland

A gunman killed two people and wounded six others in central Auckland yesterday, hours before the New Zealand city hosted the opening match of the 2023 FIFA football World Cup.

A 24-year-old shooter tore through the waterfront construction site with a shotgun in the early morning, plunging the busy centre of New Zealand's largest city into lockdown.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said the gunman also died at the scene and there was no national security threat, so the marquee tournament could go ahead as planned.

Police believe the attack was not directly linked to the World Cup, nor was it politically or ideologically motivated.

Thailand to hold PM vote without Pita next week

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's parliament will hold another vote for a prime minister next week which cannot include the leader of election winners Move Forward, a deputy speaker said yesterday, after rivals derailed his bid by blocking his re-nomination.

"A candidate can only be nominated once in each parliamentary session," Deputy House Speaker Pichet Chuamuangphan told Reuters yesterday.

Pita, 42, had faced resistance from conservative, royalist rivals determined to stop Move Forward from forming a government and pursuing its anti-establishment policy agenda.

'Priority' to stop Taiwan VP from visiting US

Says China

REUTERS, Beijing

It is China's "priority" to stop Taiwan's vice president and presidential frontrunner William Lai from visiting the United States next month, the country's ambassador in Washington said on Wednesday, as Beijing steps up its warnings against the trip.

Taiwan will hold presidential and parliamentary elections in January, with Lai, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate, the frontrunner in most opinion polls.

2 killed, hundreds arrested in Kenya protests

AFP, Nairobi

Two people were killed on Wednesday following anti-government protests in Kenya, a hospital official said, as the interior ministry announced the arrest of over 300 others in connection with the demonstrations.

Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga has held several rounds of protests since March against the government.

Clashes between police and protesters led to two deaths in the opposition bastion of Kisumu, said George Rae, CEO of Jaramogi Odinga Odinga hospital.



A protestor picks up a projectile as supporters of Kenya's opposition leader Raila Odinga of the Azimio La Umoja (Declaration of Unity) One Kenya Alliance, clash with police during an anti-government protest against the imposition of tax hikes by the government in Nairobi, Kenya yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS