

AI RISKS

Tech giants form group to ensure safety

AFP, San Francisco

Four US leaders in artificial intelligence (AI) announced yesterday the formation of an industry group devoted to addressing risks that cutting edge versions of the technology may pose.

Anthropic, Google, Microsoft, and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI said the newly created Frontier Model Forum will draw on the expertise of its members to minimize AI risks and support industry standards.

The companies pledged to share best practices with each other, lawmakers and researchers.

"Companies creating AI technology have a responsibility to ensure that it is safe, secure, and remains under human control," Microsoft president Brad Smith said in a statement.

"This initiative is a vital step to bring the tech sector together in advancing AI responsibly."



Flames and smoke rise as a wildfire burns near the village of Asklipieio, on the island of Rhodes, Greece, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Cambodian PM to step down after 4 decades

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-serving leaders, said yesterday he will resign and hand power to his eldest son after almost four decades of hardline rule.

The former Khmer Rouge cadre has run the kingdom since 1985, eliminating all opposition to his power, with rival parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled.

His Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won a landslide victory in an election on Sunday with no meaningful opposition, taking 82 percent of the vote, paving the way for a dynastic succession to his eldest son that some critics have compared to North Korea.

"I would like to ask for understanding from the people as I announce that I will not continue as prime minister," the 70-year-old said in a special broadcast on state television.

Election authorities disqualified the only serious challenger, the Candlelight Party, on a technicality in advance of the election, and the CPP is expected to win all but five lower house seats.

The government hailed the 84.6 percent voter turnout as evidence of the country's "democratic maturity" but Western powers, including the United States and the European Union, condemned the poll as neither free nor fair.

The UN's human rights chief Volker Turk added his own criticism yesterday, saying opposition parties and media had faced "restrictions and reprisals" aimed at hindering free elections.

Junta may move Suu Kyi to house arrest

Reports say

REUTERS

Myanmar's military government may move ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi from prison to house arrest in the capital, Naypyitaw, two media outlets reported yesterday.

The 78-year-old Nobel laureate has been in detention since her arrest in early 2021 when the military overthrew her elected government in a coup and unleashed a bloody crackdown on opponents that has seen thousands jailed or killed.

The Associated Press cited an unidentified security official as saying the move was an act of clemency to prisoners as part of a religious ceremony due next week.

The BBC Burmese-language service cited a "source close to the prison" as saying she may have already been moved to a house usually used by government officials.

Reuters could not independently verify the reports or Suu Kyi's whereabouts.

A spokesman for Myanmar's ruling military was not immediately available for comment. Suu Kyi's lawyers and a spokesperson for the shadow National Unity Government, could not confirm.

Russia, North Korea to strengthen defence cooperation

Says Moscow; Kyiv top diplomat visits Liberia; new \$400 million aid package for Ukraine from US includes Black Hornet spy drone

REUTERS

Russia and North Korea plan to strengthen defence cooperation, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said yesterday after talks in Pyongyang with his North Korean counterpart.

"I am convinced that today's talks will contribute to strengthening cooperation between our defence departments," Shoigu said in remarks published by Russia's Defence Ministry.

Shoigu was heading a Russian delegation visiting North Korea for commemorations marking the 70th anniversary of the Korean War and the struggle against the United States and its allies.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's top diplomat visited Liberia yesterday on a third wartime tour of Africa as Russia prepares to host a summit with leaders from the continent this week after the demise of the Black Sea grain deal.

The Liberia trip by Dmytro Kuleba, the first such visit in the history of Ukrainian diplomacy, according to the foreign ministry, comes amid a concerted push by Kyiv to challenge Russian influence in Africa and the wider "Global South".

Images from Russia's defence ministry and North Korean media showed Shoigu being greeted by North Korean defence minister Kang Sun Nam and Russian ambassador Alexander Matsegora at the airport, and rows of North Korean and Russian troops.

The United States has accused North Korea of providing weapons to Russia during the war in Ukraine, including an arms delivery of infantry rockets and missiles to the Kremlin-backed Wagner mercenary group in November 2022.

Pyongyang and Moscow have denied those claims,

but Kim has vowed to bolster strategic cooperation between the nations.

The military parade in Pyongyang is likely to include as many as 15,000 personnel, and possibly feature new designs of nuclear-capable weapons, said Yang Moo jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

Elsewhere, The US Department of Defense announced \$400 million in additional security assistance for Ukraine on Tuesday, including air defense missiles, armored vehicles and small drones, as Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia grinds on.

The new aid package, which was first reported by Reuters, will include for the first time US furnished Black Hornet surveillance drones made by Teledyne FLIR Defense, part of Teledyne Technologies TDY.N.

The Norwegian-built Hornet is being used in Ukraine through donations by the British and Norwegian governments, the company said. FLIR Unmanned Aerial Systems was awarded a \$93 million contract in April to provide the small reconnaissance drones to the US Army.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kuleba during his visit to the African country, will hold talks with Liberian leaders to discuss "ensuring the export of Ukrainian grain to Africa" as well as the vision for peace in Ukraine set out by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the ministry said.

"Against the backdrop of Russia's food blackmail, Ukraine is maximizing its consolidation of support from African countries to continue exporting Ukrainian grain to the Black Sea," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oleg Nikolenko said this week.

Taiwan conducts military drill at main airport

REUTERS, Taoyuan

Taiwan conducted an anti-aircraft landing drill at its main international airport for the first time yesterday, simulating the repulsion of an invading force as China ramps up military pressure to force the island to accept its sovereignty.

The drill at the island's main Taoyuan international airport was part of Taiwan's main annual Han Kuang exercises that started on Monday, focusing on protecting its infrastructure.

Six helicopters including Apache attack helicopters and some 180 soldiers took part in the drill to simulate the repulsion of an enemy force who had seized control of air traffic control facilities at the airport, the defence ministry said.

Soldiers carrying rifles were seen running on the runway to fight off enemy forces being dropped off by the helicopters. Shortly, a soldier waved Taiwan's national flag on a jet bridge, signalling their victory.

Overseeing a separate drill in the northern city of Taoyuan simulating physical and cyber attacks on an oil refinery, President Tsai Ing-wen said Taiwan must boost its resilience in the event of an emergency.

Florida ocean temperature tops 100F

AFP, Miami

Shallow waters off south Florida topped 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8C) for several hours on Monday, potentially setting a new world record with temperatures more commonly associated with hot tubs.

The readings were taken from a single buoy in Manatee Bay, about 38 miles (60 kilometers) southwest of Miami, at a depth of five feet (1.5 meters).

A peak temperature of 101.1F was recorded at 6:00 pm, official data showed.

The previous known high might have been 99.7F recorded in Kuwait Bay.

51 whales dead after mass stranding in Australia

AFP, Sydney



Dozens of pilot whales have died just hours after stranding themselves on a beach in Western Australia, authorities said yesterday.

The 51 long-finned pilot whales were among a pod of almost 100 spotted off Cheynes Beach near Albany, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) southeast of Perth on Tuesday.

The state's Parks and Wildlife Service said it was working with volunteers to try to save the remaining 46 whales, with plans to guide them to deeper water during the course of the day.

A spokesperson for the organisation said it had been "overwhelmed with hundreds of offers of help" but that it has enough volunteers and the public should "stay away" from the beach.

Iran enforcing 'intensified' hijab crackdown

Rights group says

AFP, Paris

Iranian authorities have in the last months launched an intensified crackdown against women deemed to have violated the Islamic republic's strict dress rules, Amnesty International said yesterday.

Iran was convulsed for months by unprecedented protests sparked by the September 2022 custody death of Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested by the morality police for purportedly breaking the rules.

With the intensity of protests diminishing over the last months, Amnesty said Iranian authorities had launched a new crackdown on women's dress since April.

"The Iranian authorities are doubling down their oppressive methods of policing and punishing women and girls to quell widespread defiance of degrading and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws," Amnesty said.

It has been obligatory for women to cover their heads and necks since shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 that ousted the secular shah.

But Amnesty said there is in fact "an intensified nationwide crackdown", and noted that police this month announced the return of car and foot patrols enforcing compulsory veiling across the country.

According to Amnesty, more than a million women have received SMS warnings threatening that their vehicles will be confiscated if they are found travelling in a car while unveiled.



Taiwanese soldiers take part in the military Han Guang drill at the Taoyuan International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

3 die in Greece as wildfires rage

AFP, Rhodes

Raging wildfires in Greece turned deadly yesterday when a firefighting plane crashed, killing two pilots, and a third person was found dead as relentless heatwaves fuelled flames.

Greece's fire department said the Canadair aircraft crashed into a ravine close to where the fire started on Sunday. Footage on state TV ERT showed the plane clipping a tree before falling nose-first and exploding.

The pilots were members of the Greek air force, and the defence ministry said it had declared a three-day mourning period.

"They lost their lives, saving lives," the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement.

The Greek defence ministry ordered three days of mourning in the armed forces.

Another man was found dead according to Greek police spokeswoman.