

NIGER COUP

West African  
leaders  
threaten  
sanctions

REUTERS, Abuja

West Africa's regional bloc ECOWAS yesterday gave Niger coup leaders one week to reinstate ousted President Mohammed Bazoum or face sanctions and the possible use of force.

The regional leaders meeting in Nigeria's capital Abuja said punitive measures against Niger's new military leaders could include financial and travel sanctions and a no-fly zone.

With military action a possibility too, ECOWAS defence chiefs would meet immediately, they said in a communique, also condemning support for the coup from some foreign nations and military contractors. The coup in Niger has been condemned by neighbours and international partners including the US, UN, AU, the EU and former colonial power France.



PHOTO: AFP

In this handout photograph taken on Saturday and released by the Afghanistan's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice yesterday, members of Taliban stand guard after setting fire to a pile of musical instruments and equipment on the outskirts of Herat.

Normalisation  
with Saudis  
does not  
appear  
imminent

Says Israeli deputy

REUTERS, Jerusalem

A top Israeli lawmaker said yesterday that any forging of relations with Saudi Arabia did not appear imminent, citing what he described as sticking points in negotiations currently being held between Riyadh and US mediators.

US President Joe Biden, having dispatched his national security adviser to Saudi Arabia to discuss a possible normalisation deal with Israel that he deems a policy priority, said on Friday that "there's a rapprochement maybe under way".

The idea has been under discussion since the Saudis gave their quiet assent to Gulf neighbours United Arab Emirates and Bahrain establishing ties with Israel in 2020.

But Riyadh has not followed suit, saying Palestinian demands must first be met.

"I think it's too early to talk about a deal being in the works," Yuli Edelstein, head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee and a senior member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, told Israel's Army Radio.

Ukrainian drone attacks  
on Moscow 'thwarted'

Says Russia; minor damage to two buildings; Putin says  
Russia does not reject peace talks with Ukraine

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia's Defence Ministry said it had brought down three Ukrainian drones early yesterday that had been trying to attack Moscow.

Nobody was hurt and there was only minor damage to the facade of two office buildings in the Moskva-Citi business district, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said.

The area, several miles from the Kremlin, is known for its modern high-rise towers and one of the buildings damaged was home to three Russian government ministries as well as residential apartments, Russian media reported.

The fact that hostile drones have begun reaching the heart of the Russian capital in recent months, even if they do not inflict serious damage, is uncomfortable for the authorities who have told the public that Russia is in full control of what they call its "special military operation" against Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday warned that "war" was coming to Russia.

"Gradually, the war is returning to the territory of Russia -- to its symbolic centres and military bases, and this is an inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process," Zelensky said on a visit to the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk.

"There were no casualties or injuries," Sobyanin, the mayor of Moskva-Citi, said in a short statement on the incident. Flights to and from Moscow's Vnukovo airport were briefly suspended due to the incident, the TASS news agency reported.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said later on Saturday that an African initiative could be a basis for peace in Ukraine but that Ukrainian attacks made it hard to realise.

He was speaking at a press conference after meeting African leaders in St Petersburg on Friday



and hearing their calls for Moscow to move ahead with their plan.

"There are provisions of this peace initiative that are being implemented," he said. "But there are things that are difficult or impossible to implement."

Reuters reported in June that African mediation in the conflict could begin with confidence-building measures followed by a cessation of hostilities agreement accompanied by negotiations between Russia and the West.

Putin said that one of the points in the initiative was a ceasefire. "But the Ukrainian army is on the offensive, they are attacking, they are implementing a large-scale strategic offensive operation... We cannot cease fire when we are under attack."

On the question of starting peace talks, he said, "We did not reject them... In order for this process to begin, there needs to be agreement on both sides."

Saudi Arabia is set to host talks in August about Ukraine, inviting Western states, Ukraine and major developing countries including India and Brazil, the Wall Street Journal reported on Saturday.

The Russian defence ministry also said yesterday it had successfully thwarted an overnight attack on the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, by 25 Ukrainian drones which it said it had either shot down or forced to crash. Nobody had been hurt and no damage done in the Crimea episode, it said.

A young woman who gave her name only as Liya described the Moscow incident. "My friends and I rented an apartment to come here and unwind, and at some point, we heard an explosion and it was like a wave, everyone jumped," she told Reuters. "And then there was a lot of smoke and you couldn't see anything. From above, you could see fire."

DEFAMATION

Trump's  
lawsuit  
against CNN  
dismissed

REUTERS

A federal judge has thrown out Donald Trump's \$475 million defamation lawsuit against CNN, in which the former president claimed the network's description of his election fraud as the "big lie" associated him with Adolf Hitler.

In a ruling late on Friday night, US Judge Raag Singhal, who was nominated by Trump in 2019, said CNN's words were opinion, not fact, and therefore could not be the subject of a defamation claim.

"CNN's statements while repugnant, were not, as a matter of law, defamatory," wrote Singhal, who sits in federal court in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, near Trump's home at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

In a statement, a Trump spokesperson said: "We agree with the highly respected judge's findings that CNN's statements about President Trump are repugnant. CNN will be held responsible for their wrongful mistreatment of President Trump and his supporters."

The lawsuit highlighted five instances in which CNN either published stories or aired comments referring to Trump's assertions about the 2020 election as his "big lie."

PM shows 'brazen  
indifference'

Says India's opposition bloc on  
Manipur violence

TOI, Imphal

Stating that the government machinery has completely failed to control the Manipur ethnic conflict, which is lingering for nearly three months, opposition bloc INDIA yesterday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his "silence", showing "brazen indifference" to the ongoing situation in the northeastern state.

In a memorandum submitted to Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey, the 21 opposition MPs who signed the document demanded urgent rehabilitation and resettlement of the affected people to bring peace and harmony to the state.

"From the reports of incessant firing and arson of houses in the last few days, it is established beyond doubt that the state machinery has completely failed to control the situation for the last almost three months," the memorandum read.

The continued internet ban for the last three months is aiding the unsubstantiated rumours, which is adding to the existing mistrust among the communities, the Parliamentarians said.

"Silence of Hon'ble Prime Minister shows his brazen indifference to the violence in Manipur," they added in the memorandum. There is anger and a sense of alienation amongst all communities, they said.

"We earnestly request you to restore peace and harmony taking all effective measures, where justice should be the cornerstone. In order to bring peace and harmony, rehabilitation and resettlement of the affected persons is most urgent," the MPs told the governor.

FIERCE STORMS IN RUSSIA

Children among  
eight dead

AFP, Moscow

Eight people including three small children died in Russia when trees crashed into a lakeside campsite during a storm described as a "hurricane", authorities said yesterday. Several hundred people camped in a national park in Mari El, a Russian region located along the northern bank of the Volga River, when the storm struck on Saturday. The Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said in a statement that the bodies of seven people including three small children were found following what it called a "hurricane", after debris was cleared at campsite overnight. Another person died in a hospital, the statement said.

Northern  
China hit by  
torrential rain

AFP, Beijing

Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from flood-prone areas of Beijing as Typhoon Doksuri lashed China's capital with heavy rain yesterday and residents were urged to stay indoors. The deadly storm has been sweeping northeast over China since Friday, when it careened into the southern Fujian province after battering the Philippines. The Chinese capital and surrounding region were drenched over the weekend, with officials warning of potentially hazardous conditions including floods, swelling rivers and landslides. More than 27,000 people in high-risk areas of Beijing have been evacuated.



Another climate  
record broken

Antarctic sea ice fallen to  
unprecedented lows for this  
time of year

CNN ONLINE

As the Northern Hemisphere swelters under a record-breaking summer heat wave, much further south, in the depths of winter, another terrifying climate record is being broken. Antarctic sea ice has fallen to unprecedented lows for this time of year.

Every year, Antarctic sea ice shrinks to its lowest levels towards the end of February, during the continent's summer. The sea ice then builds back up over the winter. But this year scientists have observed something different.

The sea ice has not returned to anywhere near expected levels. In fact it is at the lowest levels for this time of year since records began 45 years ago. The ice is around 1.6 million square kilometres below the previous winter record low set in 2022, according to data from the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC).

In mid-July, Antarctica's sea ice was 2.6 million square kilometres below the 1981 to 2010 average. That is an area nearly as large as Argentina or the combined areas of Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado.

The phenomenon has been described by some scientists as off-the-charts exceptional - something that is so rare, the odds are that it only happens once in millions of years. But Ted Scambos, a glaciologist at the University of Colorado Boulder, said that speaking in these terms may not be that helpful.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Omari, of Venezuela, holds her 10-month-old son Mattia, as migrants take rest next to razor wire laded along the bank of the Rio Grande while searching for an entry point into the United States from Mexico in Eagle Pass, Texas, US on Saturday.

Trudeau sets  
sights on 4th  
election fight

REUTERS, Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made massive changes to his cabinet last week in a move political analysts say is more theater than substance, but the Liberal leader's close advisers say it shows his determination to seek a fourth election victory.

With a string of recent polls showing the left-leaning Liberals trailing their right-of-center Conservative rivals after almost eight years in power, Trudeau changed or shifted three-quarters of his cabinet.

A cost-of-living crisis, a sharp rise in interest rates, and a chronic housing shortage have given the opposition Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre ammunition to attack Trudeau, accusing him of feeding price increases with profligate government spending, calling it "Justinflation."