

## Maldives SC bars Yameen from race

REUTERS, Male

The Maldives Supreme Court yesterday confirmed that jailed former president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom is barred from the country's September presidential election.

The ruling is another setback for the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), which declared Yameen its candidate before his December conviction for corruption and money laundering over kickbacks from a private company while he was president.

The party last week challenged the EC's block on his candidacy because he is serving an 11-year jail sentence, arguing the commission had misinterpreted the constitutional prerequisites for presidential candidates.

The commission's decision "that Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom is ineligible... under article 109 is the correct decision," Justice Husnu Al Suood ruled.

## ETHNIC VIOLENCE 15 houses set ablaze, man shot in Manipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Fifteen houses were set ablaze in the Indian state of Manipur's Imphal West district and a man was shot at in a fresh bout of arson, officials said yesterday.

The incident took place on Saturday evening at Langol Games village as a mob went on the rampage, they said.

Security personnel fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the mob and bring the situation under control, they added.

Fresh violence was also reported from Imphal East district's Checkon area where a large commercial establishment was torched on Saturday, officials said. Three nearby houses were also set on fire, they said.

The incidents of violence were reported amid the 24-hour general strike called by the coordinating committee of 27 assembly constituencies, which paralysed normal life in the Imphal valley on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Manipur police stated that they have retrieved 1,195 stolen weapons from various locations within the state. According to their statement, 1,057 arms were found in the valley districts, and 138 arms in the hill districts.

## Deadline to reverse Niger coup expires

REUTERS, Niamey

Niger's capital was calm yesterday, with citizens appearing to pay little heed to the threat of military intervention by West Africa's regional bloc, as its ultimatum for the country's coup leaders to reinstate the president expires.

On Niamey's streets there were sporadic signs of support for the junta, which has said it will not bow to external pressure to stand down following the July 26 power grab.

The seventh coup in West and Central Africa in three years has rocked the western Sahel region, one of the poorest in the world and which has strategic significance for Russia, China and the West.

Around 100 people set up a picket line near an air base in Niamey and pledged to offer non-violent resistance in support of the new military administration if needed.

Defence chiefs of the Economic Community of West African States agreed on military action on July 30, including when and where to strike, if the detained President, Mohamed Bazoum, was not released and reinstated by yesterday.

Looming hardships linked to ECOWAS sanctions have also been flagged in power cuts and soaring prices for basic foods, but many locals appear undeterred.

"I am not worried because I know that any military intervention by ECOWAS in Niger would be a loss for this organisation.

"It is not in the interest of its leaders," said 59-year-old housewife Hadjo Hadja in a mostly empty street of the capital yesterday morning.

Wedding celebrations across the city, usually held at weekends, continued as usual, with several processions of elaborately dressed marriage parties witnessed on Saturday.



Firefighters extinguish a fire in the university building following a shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine, early yesterday. Russia carried out several waves of attacks on Ukraine overnight, while Kyiv hit bridges in occupied territories yesterday.

## China water-cannoned boat in South China Sea

Says Manila; Beijing claims Philippine ships trespassed, carried illegal materials

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines yesterday accused China's coast guard of blocking and water-cannoning a Philippine military supply boat in the South China Sea, condemning the "excessive and offensive actions" against its vessels.

China's coast guard countered that it had implemented necessary controls in accordance with the law to deter Philippine ships, which it accused of trespassing and carrying illegal building materials.

After the incident, the US State Department said China's "repeated threats to the status quo in the South China Sea (were) directly threatening regional peace and stability" and that Washington stands with its Philippine allies in the face of such "dangerous actions".

"The United States reaffirms an armed attack on Philippine public vessels, aircraft, and armed forces - including those of its Coast Guard in the South China Sea - would invoke US mutual defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 US Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty," it said in a statement.

China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, an assertion rejected internationally, while Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan and the Philippines have various claims to certain areas.

Beijing often irks its neighbours with maritime actions they call



aggressive and with longer-term activities like building islands on reefs and equipping them with missiles and runways.

A Chinese coast guard vessel on Saturday blocked and water-cannoned the chartered Philippine boat on a routine troop rotation and resupply mission, "in wanton disregard of the safety of the people on board and in violation of international law", the Armed Forces of the Philippines said.

It said in a statement the incident occurred near the Second Thomas Shoal, which Manila calls Ayungin Shoal, a submerged reef where a handful of its troops live on a rusty World War Two-era US ship that was intentionally grounded in 1999.

The Chinese coast guard's

"dangerous manoeuvres" prevented a second boat from unloading the supplies and completing the mission, it said.

"We call on the China Coast Guard and the Central Military Commission to act with prudence and be responsible in their actions to prevent miscalculations and accidents that will endanger peoples' lives," the armed forces said.

China Coast Guard spokesman Gan Yu responded that China has "indisputable" sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and their adjacent waters, including the Second Thomas Shoal.

"We urge the Philippine side to immediately stop its infringing activities in this waters," Gan posted on the coast guard's WeChat social media account.

## Western bid to get Global South to back Ukraine doomed

Says Russia

REUTERS

Moscow said yesterday that weekend talks in Saudi Arabia including the US, China and India aiming to establish principles for a peaceful end to Russia's war in Ukraine were a doomed Western attempt to align Global South behind Kyiv.

Senior officials from some 40 countries were attending the 2-day meeting, part of a push by Ukraine to build support beyond its core Western backers among countries that have been reluctant to take sides in the conflict. Russia was not invited.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov called the meeting "a reflection of the West's attempt to continue futile, doomed efforts to mobilise the international community, and more precisely, the Global South, even if not entirely, in support of the so-called Zelenskiy formula, which is doomed and untenable from the outset".

Ukrainian President Zelensky said he hoped the initiative would lead to a peace summit of leaders from around the world this autumn to endorse principles for a settlement.

## Imran's lawyers can't reach him in Pakistan jail

Says his spokesperson

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani former prime minister Imran Khan's lawyers could not reach him yesterday after he spent the night in a jail near the capital following his arrest the previous day on a corruption conviction, a spokesperson said.

Khan was taken by police from his home in the eastern city of Lahore on Saturday and transferred to the jail just outside Islamabad, where a court had convicted him of charges arising over the sale of state gifts. The conviction likely means the cricket star-turned-politician will be disqualified from running in a national election.

"Attock prison is a 'No Go' area for (his) legal team as well as locals in the vicinity," said Naem Haider Panjotra, Khan's spokesperson for legal affairs, adding they were unable to take him food or arrange the signing of legal documents.

Pakistan's information minister referred a request for comment on Khan's access to his lawyers to provincial authorities in Punjab, where the jail is located. Punjab's top information official could not immediately be reached for comment.

It was not clear whether Khan would appear in court today, after a trial court's surprise weekend decision sentencing him to three years in prison.

The nationwide reaction was largely quiet, despite calls by his party on Saturday for nationwide peaceful protests.

## SHIPWRECKS OFF ITALY 30 migrants missing in rough seas: survivors

AFP, Rome

At least 30 migrants are missing following two shipwrecks off the Italian island of Lampedusa, according to survivor testimony, the UN's migration agency said yesterday. Around 28 people were reported lost at sea by survivors on one boat, while three were reported missing from the second, after both went down in stormy weather on Saturday, said the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Both were rickety iron boats believed to have set off from Sfax in Tunisia on Thursday.

Cultural mediators with the IOM believed there were "at least 30 people missing" after speaking to the survivors, press officer Flavio Di Giacomo told AFP. An investigation into the shipwrecks has been opened in Agrigento, on the nearby Italian island of Sicily. Agrigento's chief of police Emanuele Ricifari said the traffickers would have known rough seas were forecast. "Whoever allowed them, or forced them, to leave with this sea is an unscrupulous criminal lunatic," he told Italian media. "Rough seas are forecast for the next few days. Let's hope they stop. It's sending them to slaughter with this sea," he said. As the stormy weather continued, firebrigade and alpine rescue teams were preparing yesterday to pull to safety some 20 migrants trapped on a rocky part of Lampedusa's coastline. The migrants have been there since late Friday, after their boat was tossed onto the rocks by strong winds. They have been provided with food, water, clothes and emergency thermal blankets by the Red Cross, but the coastguard has been unable to rescue them by sea due to the high waves.



Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui and representatives of bereaved families enshrine a list of the atomic bomb victims at the cenotaph during a ceremony to mark the 78th anniversary of the world's first atomic bomb attack, at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, Japan yesterday.

## 24 dead in Morocco road crash

AFP, Rabat

One of Morocco's worst-ever road accidents left 24 people dead yesterday in the central province of Azilal, officials said.

They were killed when a minibus carrying passengers to a weekly market in the town of Demnate overturned on a bend, the local authorities said.

They added that an investigation has begun.

Accidents are frequent on roads of Morocco and other North African countries.

In March 11 people, mostly agricultural workers, died when their minibus slammed into a tree after the driver lost control in the rural town of Brachoua, local officials said at the time.

Many poorer citizens use coaches and minibuses to travel in rural areas.

In August last year, 23 people were killed and 36 injured when their bus overturned on a bend east of Morocco's Casablanca.