

PARLIAMENT

Modi’s govt defeats no-confidence motion

AFP, New Delhi

The government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday defeated a no-confidence motion in parliament after a fiery speech by premier at the climax of a three-day debate.

Opposition lawmakers -- who had brought the motion over months of ethnic violence in Manipur state -- walked out of the chamber, prompting a furious rebuke from the premier, with the government then winning the vote.

The walkouts, according to broadcasters, included Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, who on Wednesday said Modi’s government was “set on burning the whole country”.

Modi denounced them, saying: “Those who don’t trust democracy are always ready to make a comment but don’t have the patience to hear (the rebuttal).”



Migrants of African origin trying to flee to Europe gather on a vessel belonging to the Tunisian coast guard after they were transferred from their small boat, at sea between Tunisia and Italy yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

N Korea’s Kim calls for war preparations  
Dismisses top general

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un replaced the military’s top general and called for more preparations for the possibility of war, a boost in weapons production, and expansion of military drills, state media KCNA reported yesterday.

Kim made the comments at a meeting of the Central Military Commission which discussed plans for countermeasures to deter North Korea’s enemies, which it did not name, the report said.

The country’s stopgeneral, Chief of General Staff Pak Su Il was “dismissed,” KCNA reported, without elaborating. He had served in his role for about seven months.

Pak was replaced by General Ri Yong Gil, who previously served as the country’s defence minister, as well as the top commander of its conventional troops.

Ri also previously served as the army chief of staff. When he was replaced in 2016 his sacking and subsequent absence from official events sparked reports in South Korea that he had been executed. He reappeared a few months later, when he was named to another senior post.

Russia downs wave of Ukrainian drones

Destroys fuel depot in Rivne region; Kyiv announces ‘humanitarian corridor’ for ships stuck in Black Sea ports

AGENCIES

Russia downed 11 Ukrainian drones nearing Crimea and two headed for Moscow, officials said yesterday, the latest in a blitz of air strikes on Russian-held territory.

“Two UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) flying in the direction of the city of Moscow were destroyed,” the Russia’s defence ministry said in a statement on Telegram.

It said one drone was shot down over the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow, and another over the Odintsovsky district bordering the capital. Those drones were shot down at around 4:00 am (0100 GMT), Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin said on Telegram.

Two other Ukrainian drones were shot down near the city of Sevastopol on the Crimean coast, the defence ministry said, and “another 9 were suppressed by means of electronic warfare and crashed in the Black Sea”.

It said there were no reports of damage or casualties in any of the affected areas.

The strikes come a day after Russia said two Ukrainian combat drones headed for Moscow were shot down, and constitute at least the fourth attack near the capital within a week, reports AFP.

Russia previously said it downed a drone over Kaluga on Monday, as well as seven drones in the region last Thursday.

In a separate incident, Russian drones destroyed a fuel depot in



Ukraine’s western Rivne region in an overnight attack in the early hours of yesterday, causing a huge blaze, governor Vitaliy Koval said. There were no casualties, he said.

The Ukrainian air force said that seven out of 10 Iranian-made “Shahed” drones were shot down during the Russian attack which lasted from 23:00 (20:00 GMT) on Wednesday until 04:00 yesterday.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s navy said a new temporary Black Sea “humanitarian corridor” had started working yesterday and that the first ships were expected to use it within days.

Oleh Chalyk, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian navy, told Reuters that the corridor would be used

by commercial ships blocked at Ukraine’s Black Sea ports and for grain and agricultural products.

In Zaporizhzhia, two young women and a man were killed and nine other people were wounded in a Russian missile attack on the Ukrainian city late on Wednesday, Ukrainian officials said yesterday.

Ukraine yesterday urged civilians near the northeastern front line to evacuate as Russia ramped up an assault to capture the territory already once seized during the conflict.

Kupiansk and the surrounding areas of Ukraine’s Kharkiv region were liberated by Kyiv’s forces last September, but Moscow has since pushed back on the region.

THAI ELECTION  
Rival party backs Pheu Thai in bid to form govt

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand’s Pheu Thai party yesterday received a boost in its efforts to form a government after a ninth party joined its alliance and a senior member of a rival, military-backed party pledged its support to try to end months of deadlock.

Thailand has gone nearly five months under a caretaker government after the election-winning Move Forward party leader’s bid for premier was blocked twice by conservative and pro-army opponents.

Move Forward’s former ally, the second-place Pheu Thai party, last week took the lead in trying to form a government and is expected to face the same opposition.

Pheu Thai is set to nominate real estate tycoon Srettha Thavisin for premier and needs the support of more than half the bicameral legislature including the royalist-dominated upper house.

Previous Pheu Thai governments, backed by the billionaire Shinawatra family, were ousted by military coups in 2006 and 2014, when its interests clashed with the country’s powerful old money elites and royalist military.

Hawaii wildfires kill 36 people

Rescue efforts hampered by power outages

REUTERS, Kahului

At least 36 people have died after wildfires, fanned by winds from a faraway hurricane, devastated much of the resort city Lahaina on Hawaii’s Maui island, the Maui County said in a statement late on Wednesday.

Multiple neighbourhoods were burnt to the ground as the western side of the island was nearly cut off, with only one highway open and thousands to evacuate as officials told of widespread devastation to Lahaina, its harbor and surrounding areas.

Some people fled into the ocean to escape the smoke and flames.

“We just had the worst disaster I’ve ever seen. All of Lahaina is burnt to a crisp. It’s like an apocalypse,” said Lahaina resident Mason Jarvi, who escaped from the city.

More than 11,000 travellers were evacuated from Maui, Ed Sniffen of the Hawaii Department of Transportation said late on Wednesday. Though at least 16 roads were closed, the Maui airport was operating fully and airlines were dropping fares and offering waivers to get people off the island, Sniffen had said earlier in the day.

Evacuation efforts were complicated by power outages and disruption to cell phone service, as communication with the west side of Maui was only available via satellite, Hawaii’s Lieutenant Governor Luke said.

‘Mother Nature needs money’  
Brazil’s Lula tells rich countries at summit

AFP, Belém

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva urged wealthy nations Wednesday to fulfill their unkept promises to fund developing countries’ fight against climate change, at a summit on saving the world’s tropical forests.

Vowing to act as a bloc in future climate negotiations, the eight South American countries that share the Amazon basin and nations from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia called on the industrialized world to do more to protect Earth’s disappearing tropical forests, vital buffers against global warming.

“It’s not that Brazil needs money. It’s not that Colombia or Venezuela need money. Mother Nature needs money, it needs financing, because industrial development has destroyed it over the past 200 years,” Lula told a news conference.

But he and other leaders at the summit faced criticism themselves over their failure to adopt a pledge to stop illegal deforestation in the Amazon by 2030 and ban new oil exploration, as climate campaigners and Indigenous groups had urged.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) expressed its “great concern at the lack of a common goal to end deforestation” at the closely watched summit. Brazil’s main Indigenous organization meanwhile chastised leaders for not doing more to protect native lands, which experts say are one of the best defenses for forests.

“We hope all this effort at dialogue won’t come down to empty words,” said the Association of Brazil’s Indigenous Peoples (APIB). The two-day summit was a key test for veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January.



‘No evidence’ Facebook harms well-being: study

AFP, London

There is “no evidence” that the growth in using Facebook led to “widespread psychological harm”, the largest independent scientific study on the topic concluded Wednesday, contradicting previous analyses and widespread perceptions.

The probe by the University of Oxford’s Internet Institute, which analysed data from nearly 1 million people across 72 countries over 12 years, instead found “positive correlations” between adopting the social media platform and so-called well-being indicators.

Researchers combined data on well-being collected by Gallup with Facebook’s own global membership statistics to assess how engagement with the site related to three indicators: life satisfaction, and negative and positive psychological experiences.

Facebook provided data, which its researchers had checked for accuracy, but did not commission, fund or influence the design of the study, or know the findings beforehand, according to the Oxford team.

Their paper also underwent peer review by the journal Royal Society Open Science.

Andrew Przybylski, an Oxford University human behaviour and technology professor, said they “examined the best available data carefully -- and found they did not support the idea that Facebook membership is related to harm”.

“Quite the opposite,” he added. “In fact, our analysis indicates Facebook is possibly related to positive well-being.

But Przybylski also noted that “this is not to say this is evidence that Facebook is good for the well-being of users”.



Afghan burqa-clad women receive food from foreign aid in Kandahar, Afghanistan yesterday. The country has been teetering on the brink of famine and economic collapse since the Taliban’s return to power in August 2021 after 20 years of war and US occupation.

PHOTO: AFP

Niger coup leaders name new govt

REUTERS, Niamey

West African heads of state discussed their response to last month’s military takeover in Niger at closed-door talks in Nigeria yesterday after the junta defied their earlier threat to use force to restore democracy.

The meeting is taking place hours after Niger’s coup leaders named a new government, forcing their agenda before the summit.

Since the July 26 power grab, the junta has rebuffed diplomatic overtures and ignored an August 6 deadline from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to reinstate ousted president Mohamed Bazoum.

Mahamane Roufai Laouali, cited as “Secretary General of the Government”, named 21 ministers on state television overnight without specifying any further government plans.