

N Korea slams UN meeting as a US 'scheme'

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea slammed a recent United Nations meeting about its human rights record, asserting the United States used the international organisation for a "scheme" against Pyongyang, state media KCNA reported yesterday.

The UN Security Council discussed human rights abuses in North Korea on Thursday, with the US ambassador criticising leader Kim Jong Un for using "repression and cruelty" to develop nuclear weapons and missiles.

US President Joe Biden and the leaders of South Korea and Japan agreed at Camp David on Friday to deepen military and economic cooperation, facing China's growing power and nuclear threats from North Korea. They also agreed to hold military training exercises annually and share real-time information on North Korean missile launches by the end of the year.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Migrants arrive by boat at the Temporary Station of Humanitarian Assistance (ETAH) in Lajas Blancas, Darien Province, Panama, on Friday. According to Panama's Immigration Department, from January 1 to August 8, more than 300,000 people crossed the Darien border, despite the fact that the United States warned that it would not admit migrants who entered the Central American country in an irregular manner.

BLASPHEMY RIOTS

Pak mosques probed over protest call

AFP, Lahore

A Muslim cleric is among a dozen people being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers to order protests against alleged blasphemy by Christians which erupted into mob violence in Pakistan earlier this week, a senior police official said.

More than 80 Christian homes and 19 churches were vandalised when hundreds rampaged through a Christian neighbourhood in Jaranwala in Punjab province on Wednesday.

Reports that a holy Quran had been desecrated were broadcast from mosques, with one cleric telling his followers it was "Better to die if you don't care about Islam".

"That cleric should have understood that when you gather people in such a charged environment... in a country in which people were already very sensitive about (blasphemy) it is like adding fuel to fire," Punjab police chief Usman Anwar told AFP during an interview in Lahore on Friday.

"He's not saying that go and burn their houses. But when the mob gathers, it's really impossible to control that."

He said the cleric was one of 12 people who were being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers.

SPAIN'S TENERIFE ISLAND

More evacuations as wind fans wildfire

5,000 hectares of land so far destroyed

AFP, La Orotava

Stronger winds and higher overnight temperatures caused a vast wildfire raging out of control in Tenerife to spread, prompting more residents to flee their homes in the northern sector of the Spanish holiday island, officials said yesterday.

The huge blaze, which broke out late Tuesday in a mountainous northeastern area of the island, is the "most complex fire" to hit Spain's Atlantic Canary Islands in more than 40 years, the authorities say.

"The fire is beyond our capacity to extinguish it, maybe not in all sectors, but in a large part of the sectors," said Pedro Martinez, who is in charge of efforts to quench the blaze, saying efforts to tackle the flames were being hampered by the huge clouds of smoke and the wind.

"Weather conditions last night were frankly severe... meaning the fire spread, mainly along the northern slopes," Canary Islands leader Fernando Clavijo told reporters, pointing to "much stronger winds, temperatures much higher than expected and lower relative humidity".

By Friday night, the fire had forced more than 4,500 people to flee although there was no update on how many people had been affected by the early morning evacuations in five municipalities.

"The fire and the weather have changed and we've had to evacuate five municipalities in northern Tenerife," said Manuel Miranda, the islands' head of emergencies on X, the social network formerly known as Twitter, pointing to "the danger and the proximity of the fire".

The latest evacuations came as forecasters warned that high temperatures and strong gusts of wind over the weekend would complicate efforts to tackle the blaze.

The fire, which has a perimeter of 50 kilometres (30

miles), has so far destroyed 5,000 hectares (more than 12,300 acres) of land with 225 firefighters engaged in overnight efforts to control the flames.

The area affected by the fire equates to nearly 2.5 percent of Tenerife's surface area, which stretches 203,400 hectares.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska was due to visit the fire control centre yesterday along with Tourism Minister Hector Gomez, while Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is due to fly in on Monday, officials said.

By Friday night, the blaze had affected 10 municipalities on Tenerife, the largest of the seven islands that make up Spain's Canary Islands.

Another 1,700 people have been ordered to stay inside their homes.

On Friday, there had been a "favourable evolution" after a night in which the flames advanced more slowly and predictably and the winds had eased. That followed two days in which the behaviour of the fire was "highly unusual", complicating efforts to control it.

The blaze has generated a vast pillar of smoke that now stretches eight kilometres into the air, rising far above the summit of Mount Teide, the volcano that towers over the island.

At 3,715 metres (12,200 feet), Teide is Spain's highest peak and a popular tourist destination, but all roads to the national park were closed on Thursday.

The blaze broke out after the archipelago suffered a heatwave that left many areas tinder dry.

As global temperatures rise due to climate change, scientists have warned heatwaves will become more frequent and intense.

Last year was a particularly bad year for wildfires in Europe, with Spain the worst-hit nation, suffering nearly 500 blazes that destroyed more than 300,000 hectares, according to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).



Be mindful of reach before posting on social media

Says India SC

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Users of social media must remain mindful of its impact and reach, India's Supreme Court stressed on Friday, offering no relief to actor, playwright and former legislator S Ve Shekhar, who wanted to be let off in cases registered against him for sharing a derogatory Facebook post against women journalists in April 2018.

Shekhar claimed before a bench, led by justice Gavi, that he had put eye drops on the date of the incident, leading to his "mistake" of sharing offensive posts against women journalists without reading it or realising its content.

"If he had allegedly put eye drops, he should have been more careful about what he was doing. It is not essential to use social media. Who forces you? But if one uses social media, then he should be more careful about its impact and reach," the bench, which also comprised justice Prashant Kumar Mishra, told senior advocate S Nagamuthu, who appeared for Shekhar.

Nagamuthu submitted that Shekhar is 73 years old and has already tendered his apology before the Tamil Nadu high court.

'D-Day decided'

W Africa military chiefs ready to intervene after Niger coup

AFP, Accra

West African military chiefs said on Friday they were ready for an armed intervention in Niger after a coup ousted President Mohamed Bazoum last month, but a diplomatic mission was possible over the weekend to keep talks open.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has agreed to activate a "standby force" as a last resort to restore democracy in Niger after generals toppled and detained Bazoum on July 26.

ECOWAS defence chiefs met this week in the Ghanaian capital Accra to fine-tune details of a potential military operation to restore Bazoum if ongoing negotiations with coup leaders fail.

"We are ready to go any time the order is given," said Abdel-Fataou Musah, an ECOWAS commissioner for political affairs and security. "The D-Day is also decided."

But the leaders also say they still favour dialogue and that ECOWAS could send a diplomatic mission to Niger.

"Tomorrow there is the possibility of an ECOWAS mission going into Niger to continue to pursue the peaceful path to restoration of constitutional order," he said. "We are ready to resolve the issue peacefully but it takes two to tango."

ECOWAS leaders say they have to act after Niger became the fourth West African nation since 2020 to suffer a coup, following Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

The Sahel region is struggling with growing jihadist insurgencies linked to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. Frustration over the violence has in part prompted the military takeovers.

ECOWAS troops have intervened in other emergencies since 1990, including civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

X will scrap 'block' feature: Musk

AFP, San Francisco

Elon Musk said Friday his social media company X would scrap a feature that allows users to block posts from specific accounts. "Block is going to be deleted as a 'feature', except for DMs," Musk posted, indicating the option would still be available for "direct messages" between users of the social media platform, formerly known as Twitter. The feature is used to restrict interaction with specific accounts on the platform. Musk has repeatedly cited a desire for free speech as motivating his changes, and lashed out at what he sees as the threat posed to free expression by changing cultural sensitivities. According to the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), hate speech has flourished on the platform.

Pak opposition leader Qureshi detained

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistani opposition leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi was detained yesterday, his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party said, just hours after he said it would challenge any delay to the election in the courts. Party spokesman Zulfi Bukhari told Reuters the specific reason for detention of Qureshi, twice Pakistan's foreign minister, was not immediately clear. The caretaker information minister did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Bukhari condemned the arrest on X, saying he was "arrested for doing a press conference and re-affirming PTI stance against all tyranny and pre-poll rigging that is going on currently in Pakistan".



POST-COUP MYANMAR

Swiss nat'l arrested over film 'harming' Buddhism

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar authorities have arrested a Swiss citizen for writing and directing a film that allegedly harmed the "morality and dignity" of the Buddhist religion, the country's military said on Friday.

Didier Nusbaumer, 52, was arrested on August 8 over the film "which could harm the morality and dignity of Buddhist monks," the junta's information team said in a statement.

The roughly 75-minute film entitled "Don't Expect Anything" had been posted to a Buddhist YouTube and TikTok channel in July, the statement said.

In the film "a young woman used rude and insulting words against the culture and tradition of Buddhists by harming the good virtues of monks," it said, without giving details.

Thirteen others involved in the film who had "acted without care... to downgrade the morality and dignity" of monks were also arrested, the statement said. "Action will be taken effectively against those arrested persons."

The statement did not say if Nusbaumer was being held in custody.

AFP has contacted officials at the Swiss embassy in Yangon for comment.

Religion is an important part of daily life for many across Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where crimson-robed monks walk the streets every morning and prayer halls regularly blast chants on loudspeakers late into the evening.



Migrants disembark from the National navy public service patrol boat "Le Pluvier" on the docks of the port of Calais, northern France, yesterday. Several dozen migrants were again picked up at sea almost after their attempt to cross to Great Britain failed.

PHOTO: AFP

US warns space companies about foreign spying

REUTERS, Washington

US counterintelligence agencies on Friday warned the American space industry to guard against efforts by foreign intelligence entities to steal research and trade secrets as they try to boost their own countries' space programs.

"We anticipate growing threats to this burgeoning sector of the US economy," a US counterintelligence official told Reuters, adding that "China and Russia are among the leading foreign intelligence threats to the US space industry."

The FBI, the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) issued a two-page bulletin, saying unspecified foreign entities were using cyberattacks and techniques such as strategic investment through joint ventures and acquisitions to gain access to the US space industry.