

GUN BATTLE Main Afghan-Pak border crossing closed

REUTERS, Peshawar

The main border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan was closed yesterday as security forces from both countries exchanged fire, Pakistani security sources said.

Local residents reported the sound of gunfire by the Torkham crossing and said people around the busy border area near the Khyber Pass had fled once the firing started.

Security officials from the area who spoke on condition of anonymity said Taliban and Pakistani forces had exchanged fire but there had not yet been any casualties.

A spokesman for the local government in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province and a spokeswoman for Pakistan's foreign office did not immediately respond to request for comment.

CYCLONE REPORT Myanmar court jails journalist for 20 years

REUTERS

A court in military-ruled Myanmar yesterday sentenced a photojournalist to 20 years in prison, his employer said, the longest known prison term handed down to a media professional since the 2021 army coup.

Sai Zaw Thaikie was arrested in late May in Rakhine state while he was reporting on the Cyclone Mocha's impact.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since early 2021, when the military overthrew the elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and cracked down on opponents, with thousands jailed or killed.

The specifics of the charges against the photojournalist were not immediately clear, but initially, he faced legal action under four different laws, which included the Natural Disaster Management Law and Section 505A of the Penal Code.

"The military council sentenced Ko Sai Zaw Thaikie at his first trial on September 6 at a court inside Insein prison without having chance to have lawyer or defend himself," said a statement released by Myanmar Now.



From left to right, Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Singapore's PM Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sarun Charoensuwan, Vietnam's PM Pham Minh Chinh, US Vice President Kamala Harris, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Laos' PM Sonexay Siphandone, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's PM Hun Manet, Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim and East Timor's PM Xanana Gusmao pose for a family photo during the Asean-US Summit as part of the 43rd Asean Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Xi missing G20 summit not unusual

Says Indian FM, plays down Russian FM's threat to block final declaration

REUTERS, New Delhi

China's President Xi Jinping skipping this week's G20 summit in New Delhi was not unusual and will not affect negotiations to produce a consensus communique at the meeting, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said.

The September 9-10 summit of leaders of the world's richest countries is being held in the context of a "very turbulent" global environment and expectations from G20 to find solutions to some of the world's pressing problems are "very high", he told the ANI news agency.

Sherpas, or country representatives, of the G20 members are negotiating to build a consensus and arrive at a declaration at the summit in New Delhi, Jaishankar said in the interview, which was aired yesterday.

Jaishankar also played down a threat from his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov - who will represent Moscow at the summit in President Vladimir Putin's place - that Russia will block the summit's final declaration unless it reflects Moscow's position on Ukraine and other crises.

He said countries try to maximise their negotiating positions and people should not "prejudge" the outcome. "I am confident that every one of the G20 coming to Delhi will understand



the responsibility that they bear... that the other 180 countries of the world are looking to them to set directions and that they cannot afford to fail them."

The G20 is "very much a collaborative forum" and "not the arena for power politics", Jaishankar told ANI.

"Today, the expectations of the world are very high in terms of what the G20 is able to produce, and produce in terms of meeting the challenges of the world."

G20 groups the 20 major economies of the world but it has been divided due to differences over the war in Ukraine.

The absence of Putin and Xi as well as divisions over the war mean it would be difficult to arrive at a consensus Leaders Declaration at the summit, analysts and officials

have said. Jaishankar said leaders had skipped summits in the past and Xi doing so was not unusual and had nothing to do with India.

India-China relations have been frozen since a deadly military clash on their Himalayan frontier in June 2020 and analysts said Xi giving the summit a miss was a new setback to ties between the Asian giants.

But Xi's absence could also be a signal of his narrative of 'East is rising, and the West is falling', as well as showing solidarity with Putin, said Wen-Ti Sung, political scientist at the Australian National University.

China will be represented by Premier Li Qiang at the summit and Jaishankar noted that a "country's position is obviously reflected by whoever is the representative".

SUDAN CONFLICT US hits RSF commanders with sanctions

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday slapped sanctions on top officials of Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for a range of alleged murders and rights abuses, including the killing of the governor of West Darfur.

At the same time, the State Department announced \$163 million in new humanitarian assistance to help victims and refugees of Sudan's nearly five-month-old civil war.

The US Treasury sanctioned RSF senior commander Abdelrahim Hamdan Daglo and the brother of Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, leader of the paramilitary RSF.

Under Abdelrahim Daglo, the Treasury said, RSF members "have engaged in acts of violence and human rights abuses, including the massacre of civilians, ethnic killings, and use of sexual violence."

It said that many of the abuses took place in the Darfur region of Sudan.

The US State Department meanwhile placed RSF general and West Darfur sector commander Abdul Rahman Juma on its blacklist for what it called "his involvement in a gross violation of human rights."

Asean summit note uses 'PM of Bharat'

India's opposition irked

THE STATESMAN ONLINE

After the row over the use of 'President of Bharat' instead of the traditional 'President of India' in the official dinner invitations sent to guests attending this week's G20 summit, a note on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Indonesia visit to attend the 20th Asean-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit has used the term "Prime Minister of Bharat". On Monday, India's opposition leaders lambasted the government for changing the name of the country in official communications after dinner invitations from President Droupadi Murmu sent to G20 guests mentioned her as 'President of Bharat' instead of India. The opposition leaders said that the government changed the name because they have named their alliance INDIA. Leaders of at least 28 opposition parties have formed an alliance to fight the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections unitedly. They have named their alliance INDIA - an acronym for Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance. "If the name of the alliance is changed to Bharat, will they change the name of Bharat to BJP?" asked Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, whose Aam Aadmi Party is also part of the INDIA bloc. Criticising the name change move, Kejriwal said that the country belongs to 140 crore people and not just to one party.

MANIPUR VIOLENCE SC protects four members of Editors Guild of India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian Supreme Court yesterday protected four members of the Editors Guild of India against any coercive action till Monday in connection with two FIRs lodged in the ethnic strife-affected north eastern state of Manipur. The FIRs were filed against them on charges of offences, including promoting enmity between two communities. A bench, consisting of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, also sought a response from the Manipur government on the plea filed by the Editors Guild. The top court agreed to hear the plea filed by the Editors Guild earlier in the day. Meanwhile, 24-hour curfew was clamped in all the five valley districts of Manipur,

as a preventive measure from Tuesday evening,

following a call by an outfit demanding removal of security barricade at a particular place, officials said. The cancellation of curfew relaxation hours from 5:00 am to 6:00 pm in Bishnupur, Kakching, Thoubal, Imphal West and Imphal East comes in the wake

of the call by the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) and its women wing requesting people from all parts of the valley districts to remove an army barricade at Phougakchao Ikhai in Bishnupur district, a few kilometres away from Churachandpur, on Wednesday, officials said. Manipur government spokesperson Sapam Ranjan told reporters in Imphal, the state capital, that "the government appeals to COCOMI to withdraw the proposed plan to storm the army barricade at Phougakchao Ikhai near Torbung on September 6."



Japan city to use robots to tackle school truancy

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese city plans to use robots to enable pupils to attend classes virtually, as truancy rates surge due to anxiety and bullying, officials said yesterday.

Children will be able to use devices at home to remotely manoeuvre robots that represent them at school, allowing them to take part in classes and discussions with schoolmates, the southern city of Kumamoto said.

Like other countries, Japan has seen a rise in children not attending school following the Covid-19 pandemic, with reasons for being absent ranging from difficulty fitting in to bullying, according to a government probe.

The one-metre (three-foot) tall robots will be self-propelling, with pupils able to move them within the school grounds and even participate in events, reports said.

"Communicating through these robots is not completely real-life, but can at least give a certain sense of reality to kids who are still unsure and afraid of interacting with others," Maki Yoshizato, a Kumamoto city official, told AFP.

"We hope this undertaking will help alleviate their psychological fears."

Across Japan, the number of truant pupils at elementary and middle school levels hit an all-time high of 244,940 in fiscal year 2021, according to the latest education ministry survey.



People try to pull out a car submerged in the sea at Arapia camping site near Tsarevo along the Bulgarian Black sea coast yesterday. The death toll from torrential rains and flooding on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast has climbed to three, police said.

PHOTO: AFP

Cancer surging among under-50s worldwide

AFP, Paris

The number of people under 50 diagnosed with cancer has surged worldwide in the last three decades but it is not fully clear why, a study said yesterday.

Cases of cancer among people aged 14 to 49 rose by nearly 80 percent, from 1.82 million to 3.26 million, between 1990 to 2019, according to the study published in the journal BMJ Oncology.

While experts cautioned that some of that increase was explained by population growth, previous research has also indicated that cancer is becoming more commonly diagnosed among under-50s.

The international team of researchers behind the new study pointed to poor diet, smoking and alcohol as major risk factors underlying cancer in the age group.

But "the increasing trend of early-onset cancer burden is still unclear," they added.