

MOSCOW ATTACK

Russia again
blames Kyiv,
West

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday sought to shift blame for the Moscow concert hall attack onto Ukraine and its Western backers, despite the Islamic State group claiming responsibility for the massacre of at least 139 people.

The Kremlin's security services have been scrambling to explain how the gunmen on Friday managed to carry out the worst attack in Russia in over two decades.

President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged that the "radical Islamists" conducted the bloody assault, but suggested they were linked to Ukraine.

The head of Russia's FSB security agency Alexander Bortnikov said yesterday that while those who had "ordered" the attack had not been identified, the assailants were heading to Ukraine and would have been "greeted as heroes".



People inspect the damage to a building that was hit overnight during Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel says it plans a ground offensive into Rafah, where it believes most Hamas fighters are now sheltering.

PHOTO: AFP

SUICIDE ATTACK

Five Chinese
dam workers,
driver killed
in Pakistan

REUTERS, Peshawar

A suicide bomber rammed a vehicle into a convoy of Chinese engineers working on a dam project in northwest Pakistan yesterday, killing six people, police said, the third major attack on Chinese interests in the South Asian country in a week.

The first two attacks targeted a Pakistan naval air base and a strategic port used by China in the southwest province of Balochistan where Beijing is investing billions in infrastructure projects.

The engineers were en route from Islamabad to their camp at the dam construction site in Dasu in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, regional police chief Mohammad Ali Gandapur said.

"Five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver were killed in the attack," Gandapur told Reuters.

Dasu is the site of a major dam and the area has been attacked in the past.

Chinese engineers have been working on a number of projects in Pakistan with Beijing investing over \$65 billion in infrastructure works as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under Beijing's wider Belt and Road initiative.

UN expert accuses Israel
of 'genocide' in Gaza

Albanese says there are clear indications Israel has violated three of five acts listed under UN Genocide Convention

AFP, Geneva

A UN rights expert on Monday said there were "reasonable grounds" to determine that Israel has committed several acts of "genocide" in its offensive in Gaza, also warning of "ethnic cleansing".

Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the rights situation in the Palestinian territories, said there were clear indications that Israel had violated three of the five acts listed under the UN Genocide Convention.

"The overwhelming nature and scale of Israel's assault on Gaza and the destructive conditions of life it has inflicted reveal an intent to physically destroy Palestinians as a group," she said in a report, which was immediately rejected by Israel as an "obscene inversion of reality".

Albanese, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, said she had found "reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of... acts of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza has been met".

The report, entitled "Anatomy of a Genocide", listed those acts as: "killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to the group's members; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical



destruction in whole or in part".

Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva said the country "utterly rejects the report", describing it as "simply an extension of a campaign seeking to undermine the very establishment of the Jewish State".

"Israel's war is against Hamas, not against Palestinian civilians," it said in a statement, slamming Albanese's "outrageous accusations".

Israel has long been harshly critical of Albanese and her mandate, which the US on Monday called "biased against Israel."

Washington is "aware" of Albanese's report but has "no reason to believe Israel has committed acts of genocide in Gaza," a US official told AFP.

Last month Israel slapped a visa ban on her after she made comments denying that Hamas's October 7 attack was anti-Semitic.

Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza has since killed more than 32,300 people, mainly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory.

South Africa has already filed a complaint against Israel before the International Court of Justice, alleging its assault on Gaza amounts to a violation of the genocide convention.

The court has yet to rule on the underlying issue, but earlier this year ordered Israel to do everything it could to prevent genocidal acts.

NZ accuses
China of
hacking
parliament

Beijing issues
strong rebuke

REUTERS, Wellington

The New Zealand government said yesterday it had raised concerns with the Chinese government about its involvement in a state-sponsored cyber hack on New Zealand's parliament in 2021, which was uncovered by the country's intelligence services.

The revelations that information was accessed through malicious cyber activity targeting New Zealand's parliamentary entities comes as Britain and the US accuse China of a wide-sweeping cyber espionage campaign. Both New Zealand and Australia have condemned the broader activity.

"Foreign interference of this nature is unacceptable, and we have urged China to refrain from such activity in future," New Zealand's FM Winston Peters said.

China said it had issued a "strong" rebuke to the US, New Zealand and the UK over the allegation.

Peters said concerns about cyber activity attributed to groups sponsored by the Chinese government, targeting democratic institutions had been conveyed to the Chinese ambassador.

EXTRADITION TO US

Assange wins
temporary
reprieve

UK court rules he can take
appeal to new hearing

REUTERS, London

WikiLeaks' Julian Assange can continue his fight against extradition to the United States after the High Court in London ruled yesterday he should be allowed to appeal against it unless the US promises he will not face the death penalty. US prosecutors are seeking to put Assange, 52, on trial on 18 counts, all bar one under the Espionage Act, over WikiLeaks' high-profile release of confidential US military records and diplomatic cables. Assange's lawyers in February sought permission to challenge Britain's approval of his extradition. In the ruling, two senior judges said he had a real prospect of successfully appealing against extradition on a number of grounds. The court said that Assange arguably would not be entitled to rely on the First Amendment right to free speech as a non-US national and that he could later be charged with a capital offence, meaning it would be unlawful to extradite him. British ministers "had an explicit statutory obligation not to order the applicant's extradition if he could be sentenced to death for the offence concerned, or if he could be charged with an extradition offence ... in respect of which a sentence of death could be imposed," the judges said.

ARRESTED DELHI CM

US encourages
'fair, transparent
legal process'

Dozens of AAP supporters
detained during protest

REUTERS, Washington

The US is closely following reports of the arrest of Indian opposition figure Arvind Kejriwal and encourages a fair legal process, a State Department spokesperson said on Monday after Germany's reaction to the case sparked a protest from India. Kejriwal, a national opposition figure and chief minister of Delhi's capital territory, was arrested by India's financial crime-

fighting agency on Thursday on corruption charges that his political party rejects, a month before national elections.

"We encourage a fair, transparent, and timely legal process for Chief Minister Kejriwal," the US spokesperson said in response to an emailed query about the case, in which India summoned a German envoy on Saturday to protest against his government's

remarks about the arrest. Asked about the arrest at a government press conference on Friday, Sebastian Fischer, spokesperson for Germany's foreign office said that like anyone else facing accusations, Kejriwal was entitled to a fair and impartial trial. "We assume and expect that the standards relating to independence of judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied in this case," he said. Meanwhile, Delhi police yesterday detained dozens of supporters of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as they attempted to march to Modi's residence to protest against last week's arrest of Kejriwal.

Planting trees in
wrong places heats
the planet: study

AFP, Paris

Planting trees in the wrong places can actually contribute to global warming, scientists said yesterday, but a new map identifies the best locations to regrow forests and cool the planet.

Trees soak up carbon dioxide and restoring areas of degraded woodlands or planting saplings to boost forest cover is one tool in the fight against climate change.

But in some cases, more trees mean less sunlight is reflected back from the earth's surface and more heat is absorbed by the planet, according to a study in the journal Nature Communications.

"There are some places where putting trees back leads to net climate negative outcomes," Susan Cook-Patton, one of the study's co-authors, told AFP.

Scientists had already understood that restoring tree cover led to changes in albedo – the amount of solar radiation bounced back off the planet's surface – but didn't have the tools to account for it, she said.

Using new maps, researchers were able to consider, for the first time, the cooling effect from trees and the warming caused by decreased albedo. They found that projects that didn't factor albedo into the equation overestimated the climate benefit of additional trees by between 20 to 80 percent.



Jolimar, an 18-year-old migrant from Venezuela, shelters her two-year-old son Gail from the cold and blustery weather as they search for an entry point into the US past a fortified fence laden with razor wire along the bank of the Rio Grande river in El Paso, Texas, US on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MIGRANT CRISIS

Majority of
deaths in 10
years from
drowning: UN

AFP, Berlin

Drowning had been the biggest cause of recorded migrant deaths over the past 10 years, the UN's migration agency said yesterday, with victim numbers topping 36,000.

Of 64,000 migrant deaths recorded by UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) over last decade, nearly 60 percent were linked to drowning.

Of those deaths at sea, over 27,000 occurred in the Mediterranean, a route followed over the years by many migrants trying to reach southern Europe from northern Africa.

The IOM however stressed the figures published in report were incomplete. Of those recorded, two in three cases remained unidentified. In over half of all cases, the IOM was unable to even establish the sex or age of the migrant.