

## China promises aid for polls in Myanmar

REUTERS

China has promised technical support and aid to military-run Myanmar for conducting a census, followed by an election, state media said yesterday, signalling Beijing's backing to a junta cornered by an armed rebellion.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on Wednesday during a visit to the capital Naypyitaw where they held discussions to conduct an "all-inclusive election", Global New Light of Myanmar said.

"Necessary technological assistance will be provided for Myanmar to conduct the census-taking process," the state-run publication said. "Moreover, essential aid will be given for the election."

Myanmar's generals last month extended emergency rule for another six months to allow more time to put together census data for voter lists.



Palestinians react as they wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, amid a hunger crisis in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. An estimated 495,000 people in Gaza – or 22 percent of the population – are "experiencing an extreme lack of food," according to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## WHO declares mpox a global emergency

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization on Wednesday declared the mpox surge in Africa a global public health emergency, sounding its highest possible alarm over the worsening situation.

Worried by the rise in cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the spread to nearby countries, the WHO hastily convened a meeting of experts to study the outbreak.

"Today, the emergency committee met and advised me that in its view, the situation constitutes a public health emergency of international concern. I have accepted that advice," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference.

A PHEIC is the highest level of alarm under the International Health Regulations, which are legally binding on 196 countries.

"The detection and rapid spread of a new clade of mpox in eastern DRC, its detection in neighbouring countries that had not previously reported mpox, and the potential for further spread within Africa and beyond is very worrying," said Tedros.

"It's clear that a coordinated international response is essential to stop these outbreaks and save lives."

## Israel intensifying attacks on Gaza schools

Says UN as data shows 564 schools have been directly hit or damaged since the offensive began

AGENCIES

Last week more than 100 people were killed after Israel hit a school in Gaza City sheltering displaced Palestinians, as the United Nations accused Israel of intensifying attacks on schools.

The targeting of al-Talbin School on Saturday during dawn prayers triggered global outrage.

Paramedics at the scene described the carnage as horrific, with "bodies ripped to pieces". Israel claimed that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters were operating from the school – a claim that was rejected by Hamas.

Israel has repeatedly attacked Gaza's schools, hospitals and universities, claiming the buildings were used for military purposes without providing any proof.

According to data compiled by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), up to July 6, 564 schools in the Gaza Strip have been directly hit or damaged by Israeli attacks.

With numerous evacuation orders since the offensive in Gaza began on October 7, schools have often been used to shelter nearly two million displaced Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, schools are considered civilian objects and should be protected from attacks. However, within a 10-day period in August, Israeli forces struck five schools in Gaza City, killing



more than 179 people and injuring scores more.

At least 15 people were killed and more than 29 injured in an Israeli strike on the Dalal al-Mughhrabi School on August 1, according to officials.

Two days later, strikes on Hamama and al-Huda schools killed 17 and injured more than 60 people, reports Al Jazeera online.

On August 4, at least 30 people were killed and 19 others injured after Israel struck Nassr and Hassan Salameh schools in the Nassr neighbourhood in Gaza City.

Israel bombed Abdul Fattah Hamouda and az-Zahra schools, killing 17 and injuring dozens more on August 8.

The worst attack in recent weeks was on al-Tabin School, which Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary said was hit by at least three missile attacks.

The UN's special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory, Francesca Albanese, condemned the attack.

"Israel is genociding the Palestinians, one neighbourhood at the time, one hospital at the time, one school at the time, one refugee camp at the time, one 'safe zone' at the time. With US and European weapons," she posted on X.

In July, a similar cluster campaign targeting school buildings in Gaza have been damaged, with nearly all schools in North Gaza either being "directly hit" or damaged. This is followed by Gaza City, where more than 90 percent of the schools have been damaged or destroyed.

GRAFT CASE

## Pakistan's army arrests three more ex-officers

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's military said yesterday it had arrested three more retired officers following the arrest of former spy chief Faiz Hameed, who faces a court martial on charges of corruption and misuse of power.

The arrests were in connection with the proceedings against Hameed, who formerly led premier spy agency Inter-services Intelligence (ISI), for "actions prejudicial to military discipline", the military said.

In a statement, it added that the military continued to investigate some retired officers and their accomplices for "fomenting instability at the behest of, and in collusion with, vested political interests".

Political parties and critics often accuse that the spy agency interferes in politics and government. Hameed, a general, served as the ISI chief from 2019 to 2021 during the tenure of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is now in jail.

Khan has said he did not want to relieve Hameed of his role at the spy agency after he was transferred elsewhere by his army chief, Qamar Javed Bajwa.

## Indian protests over medic's murder grow

PM demands swift justice

AFP, Kolkata

Thousands took to the streets of Kolkata early yesterday morning to condemn the rape and murder of a medic that has triggered protests across India demanding better safety for women.

The discovery of the 31-year-old's brutalised body last week at a state-run hospital has sparked widespread outrage, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding swift punishment for those who commit "monstrous deeds" against women.

Large crowds marched through the streets of Kolkata in West Bengal to condemn the killing, with a candlelight rally at midnight coinciding with the start of India's independence day celebrations yesterday.

The protesters in Kolkata, who marched under the slogan "reclaim the night", called for a wider tackling of violence against women and held up handwritten signs demanding action.

"We want justice," read one sign at the rally. "Hang the rapist, save the women," read another.

"The atrocities against women do not stop," midnight marcher Monalisa Guha told Kolkata's The Telegraph newspaper. "We face harassment almost on a daily basis," another marcher, Sangeeta Halder, told the daily. "But not stepping out because of fear is not the solution."

Doctors in government hospitals across several states on Monday halted elective services "indefinitely", demanding speedy justice and better workplace security.

Protests have since occurred in several other hospitals across the country, including in the capital.

SRI LANKA ELECTION

## Polls panel approves Wickremesinghe for presidential race

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's election panel yesterday gave approval for President Ranil Wickremesinghe to contest a presidential poll set for September 21 in the Indian Ocean nation, grappling with the fallout of its worst financial crisis in decades.

Wickremesinghe was among 39 candidates to submit nominations for the vote, key to charting Sri Lanka's way out of a crisis unleashed after exhausting its foreign reserves, sending the economy into freefall and defaulting on foreign debt in 2022.

"We have to stabilise the economy," Wickremesinghe told reporters after his candidacy was announced.

"What we are saying is, 'Let's go ahead and finish this job.' That's why I'm asking for your support."



Two Buddhist monks were among those who registered, in one of the highest such figures on record, to contest the vote, in which about 17 million Sri Lankans are eligible to cast ballots.

Wickremesinghe, opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and Marxist-leaning parliamentarian Anura Kumara Dissanayake are seen as frontrunners.

"This is an opportunity for the people to bring about genuine change and create a new political culture," Dissanayake, whom analysts consider a dark horse contender, said while leaving the Election Commission after it approved his candidacy.

"That is our aim and I'm confident we can win."

After being elected by parliament in July 2022, Wickremesinghe, 75, has shepherded the island through the crisis, which triggered widespread protests and forced his predecessor, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to resign.

## Antarctica winter experiences prolonged heatwave

AFP, Paris

Antarctica, the world's coldest continent, is experiencing an exceptionally long heatwave during its winter, according to Britain's national polar research institute.

Temperature anomalies are not unusual on the continent known as "The Ice" but "the longevity of the warm period is unusual", Thomas Caton Harrison, Polar Climate Scientist at British Antarctic Survey, said to AFP this week.

Provisional figures indicate the Antarctic-wide July 2024 average near-surface temperature was 3.1 degrees Celsius above normal for the month.

Calculated over land and land ice, this makes it the second warmest July in Antarctica since records began in 1979 – the warmest was in July 1981.

Average daily temperatures ranged from -34.68C on July 15 to -28.12C on July 31, according to data posted online by the University of Maine.

It was -26.6C on average on the continent on August 7, the latest date available.

The July average temperature anomaly even reached 9-10C over limited parts of Dronning Maud Land and part of the eastern Weddell Sea offshore.

Daily temperature anomalies often occur during the Antarctica's winter, but "what is remarkable is prolonged high temperatures", said Caton Harrison.

"Very early figures suggest it could be on track to be an exceptionally warm Antarctic winter," he added.

"The Ice" is the coldest, windiest, and least populated continent on the planet, but it too is impacted by global warming.



A US helicopter, part of a Nato peacekeeping mission makes a water drop, as a wildfire burns in Prevalle, Kosovo on Wednesday. The challenge is to stop slow burning trees which can ignite again with a more destructive fire.

PHOTO: REUTERS

FALSE CONVICTION

## US man gets \$7m after 48 years in jail

AFP, Washington

A 71-year-old man who spent nearly five decades in prison for a murder he did not commit is to receive a \$7.15 million settlement from the US city that convicted him.

Glynn Simmons, who is Black, served more time behind bars before being exonerated than any other inmate in US history.

Simmons was released last year after serving a total of 48 years, one month and 18 days in prison.

On Monday, councillors in Edmond, Oklahoma, voted to proceed with a settlement for Simmons to resolve claims against the city and one of the detectives who helped put him away.

Lawyers for Simmons said the payment represented a "partial settlement" of his lawsuit "against the cities and police who falsified evidence... to frame him for murder."