

I-DAY SPEECH

India's Modi renews push for common civil code

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday he wanted to press ahead with a national common civil code of law, a proposal bitterly opposed by Muslim activists as an attack on their faith.

India's 1.4 billion people are subject to a common criminal law but rules vary on personal matters.

The proposed civil code would standardise laws across all religious communities but has been bitterly opposed by Muslim activists and liberals as an attack on the largest religious minority.

However, Modi said during an annual Independence Day address: "Those laws that divide the country on the basis of religion, that become reason for inequality, should have no place in a modern society."

UN report on vote 'rife with lies'

Says Venezuelan electoral council

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's CNE electoral council, under fire after declaring a widely rejected election victory for President Nicolas Maduro, on Wednesday described a UN report disputing the outcome as "rife with lies."

The CNE proclaimed Maduro the winner with 52 percent of votes cast in a July 28 poll, without providing a detailed breakdown.

Maduro's victory has been rejected by the opposition, the United States, European Union and several Latin American countries.

Anti-Maduro protests in Venezuela have claimed 25 lives so far, with dozens injured and more than 2,400 arrested.

A preliminary report published Tuesday by a panel of UN elections experts found the CNE "fell short of the basic transparency and integrity measures."

The CNE hit back Wednesday, saying the UN report was "rife with lies and contradictions" and insisting a "cyber terrorist attack" has prevented it from disclosing a full breakdown of polling-station-level results after what it termed an "impeccable and transparent electoral process."

Iran hackers target Harris, Trump campaigns: Google

AFP, San Francisco

Google has confirmed that hackers backed by Iran are targeting the campaigns of US presidential rivals Kamala Harris and Donald Trump.

A hacker group known as "APT42" linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps went after high-profile individuals and organizations in Israel and the United States, including government officials and political campaigns, according to a threat report released by Google on Tuesday.

Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris's campaign said Tuesday it had been targeted by foreign hackers, days after rival Donald Trump's campaign suggested that it had been hacked by Iran.

"In July, the campaign legal and security teams were notified by the FBI that we were targeted by a foreign actor influence operation," a Harris campaign official told AFP.

"We have robust cybersecurity measures in place and are not aware of any security breaches of our systems resulting from those efforts."

Google's threat analysis group continues to see unsuccessful attempts from APT42 to compromise personal accounts of individuals affiliated with President Joe Biden, Vice President Harris and Trump, the report said.

The hacking group works by gleaning information about targets and tailoring "phishing" efforts to dupe victims into revealing log-in information for accounts like Gmail.

Examples given in the report included posing as a think tank or other credible contact to lure victims to fake video meeting landing pages, where log-in credentials are needed to take part.



War-displaced people receive humanitarian aid at a Russian Red Cross distribution point in Kursk yesterday, following Ukraine's offensive into Russia's western Kursk region.

PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine's forces pushing along border front

Says Russia; Kyiv creates buffer zone to protect population

REUTERS, Moscow

A senior Russian commander said yesterday that Ukrainian forces had been pushed out of one village in Russia's border region but that Kyiv's forces were still probing along the front more than nine days since the lightning incursion into Russia.

The biggest foreign attack on sovereign Russian territory since World War Two unfurled on August 6 when thousands of Ukrainian troops smashed through Russia's western border in an embarrassment for the Russian top military brass.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Wednesday that his forces had advanced a few kilometers and that the goal of replenishing an 'exchange fund' of prisoners of war was being achieved. One Ukrainian official said Kyiv was carving out a buffer zone to protect its population against attack.

Major General Ahti Alaudinov, who commands Chechnya's Akhmat special forces who are fighting in Kursk, said that Russian forces had forced out Ukraine from Martynovka about 18 km (11 miles) from the border.

"We have burned everything that moves, everything that we have been able to find," Alaudinov told Russian state television from Kursk region, reminding viewers of Russia's defeat of Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia.

Alaudinov, a close ally of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, said that Ukraine was



sending in more forces into the Russian region but that the shift in resources was weakening Ukrainian forces at other parts of the front.

"The enemy is pushing, he is trying to get through from everywhere, push through," Alaudinov said, admitting that initiative was still with Ukraine. "But every day the enemy's forces are melting."

The Russian town of Sudzha, a transshipment hub for Russian natural gas flowing to Europe via Ukraine, was not under full Ukrainian control, he said. Ukraine on Wednesday said it was fully under Ukrainian control.

Alaudinov also spoke of the chaotic battlefield situation in the region when his forces arrived shortly after the incursion, with forests teaming with Ukrainian

forces and a lack of clarity on whose forces were where.

Ukraine's incursion appeared aimed at forcing Moscow to slow its advance along the rest of the front inside Ukraine, though the Russian defence ministry also reported intense battles along the Ukraine front and said that its troops had taken better positions at several points.

Ukraine said there was no sign Russian military pressure was receding along the eastern front inside its borders yesterday and reported the heaviest fighting in weeks near Pokrovsk. Supported by swarms of drones, heavy artillery and tanks, Ukrainian units have since carved out a sliver of the world's biggest nuclear power and battles were ongoing along a front about 18 km inside Russian territory yesterday.

Colonel dies after coalition strike in Syria

Says Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps yesterday said one of its colonels has died of wounds suffered in an air strike it blamed on the US-led coalition in Syria.

Ahmadreza Afshari of the IRGC's "aerospace advisory forces" in Syria was "martyred because of injuries caused by aerial bombardment", Guards' chief Hossein Salami said in a statement carried by state news agency IRNA.

The colonel was transferred from Syria to Iran for treatment following the air strike, the statement said, indicating the incident occurred two to three weeks ago.

In late July, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said an air strike killed three pro-Iran fighters in Syria's Deir Ezzor province, where Iran wields significant influence.

The area is regularly targeted by Israel and sometimes by the United States. Responsibility for the strike was not immediately claimed.

A spokesman for the US-led military coalition formed in 2014 to fight the Islamic State jihadist group said at the time that "neither the coalition nor US forces carried out overnight strikes in Deir Ezzor".

1.4m girls banned from Afghan schools since Taliban return

Says Unesco

AFP, Paris

At least 1.4 million girls in Afghanistan have been denied access to secondary education since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, with the future of an entire generation now "in jeopardy", the United Nations' cultural agency said yesterday.

Access to primary education has also fallen sharply, with 1.1 million fewer girls and boys attending school, Unesco said in a statement as the Taliban authorities marked three years since retaking Afghanistan on August 15, 2021.

"Unesco is alarmed by the harmful consequences of this increasingly massive drop-out rate, which could lead to a rise in child labour and early marriage," the agency said.

"In just three years, the de facto authorities have almost wiped out two decades of steady progress for education in Afghanistan, and the future of an entire generation is now in jeopardy."

There are now nearly 2.5 million girls deprived of their right to education, representing 80 percent of Afghan school-age girls, the UN agency said.

The Taliban administration, which is not recognised by any other country, has imposed restrictions on women that the UN has described as "gender apartheid."

THAI POLITICAL CRISIS

Pheu Thai party chooses Shinawatra as PM candidate

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's Pheu Thai party has chosen 37-year-old Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the daughter of billionaire ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra, as its candidate for prime minister, it announced yesterday, a day after a court dismissed the incumbent premier in an ethics case.

"We decide to nominate Paetongtarn Shinawatra," party secretary general Sorawong Thienthong told a press conference in Bangkok.

L a w m a k e r s will vote today in parliament -- where Pheu Thai heads a governing coalition -- on whether to approve Paetongtarn as prime minister.

The vote comes after Thailand's Constitutional Court sacked premier Srettha Thavisin on Wednesday after ruling he had breached regulations by appointing a cabinet minister with a criminal conviction.

Srettha was the third prime minister from Pheu Thai to be kicked out by the Constitutional Court and leaves office after less than a year.

Thai politics has endured two decades of chronic instability marked by coups, street protests and court orders.

Much of it has been fuelled by the long-running battle by the military and pro-royalist establishment against progressive parties linked to Thaksin.



A drone view shows a bridge submerged by the flooded La Plata River in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Ernesto in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Record number of forest fires in Brazil Amazon

AFP, Manaus

The Brazilian Amazon has recorded more than 37,000 forest fires so far this year, the worst number in nearly two decades, according to satellite data released Wednesday.

The number was 111 percent higher than in the same period of 2023, said Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

Since the INPE started collecting data in 1998, more fires were recorded in the same period only in 2005, 2004 and 2003.

From January 1 to August 13, a total of 37,835 fires were noted in the Brazilian Amazon this year.

The Amazon suffered a historic drought between June and November last year, conducive to fires that have also affected the Pantanal, one of the world's largest tropical wetlands which lies south of the rainforest.