

Suspend co-op treaty with Israel

Media groups call on European Union

AFP, Paris

Some 60 media and rights organisations yesterday urged the European Union to suspend a co-operation accord with Israel and impose sanctions, accusing it of "massacring journalists" in Gaza.

"In response to the unprecedented number of journalists killed and other repeated press freedom violations by the Israeli authorities since the start of the war with Hamas, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and 59 other organisations are calling on the European Union to suspend its Association Agreement with Israel and to adopt targeted sanctions against those responsible", the groups said in a joint statement.

The call came ahead of a meeting by EU foreign ministers in Brussels on August 29.



Palestinians evacuate patients from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip yesterday following renewed Israeli evacuation orders for the area.

PHOTO: AFP

Morality law will be 'gently' enforced

Says Afghanistan's Taliban govt

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said yesterday a recently ratified morality law would be enforced "gently", after the international community and Afghans voiced concern over new restrictions.

Women must cover completely and not raise their voices in public, according to a 35-article law announced Wednesday by the justice ministry.

It imposes wide-ranging stipulations from behaviour to dress and social interactions, including rules on men's clothing and beard length as well as bans on homosexuality, animal fighting, playing music in public and non-Muslim holidays.

The UN, rights groups and Afghans have expressed concern that the law could lead to increased enforcement of the rules, many already informally in place since the Taliban authorities took power in 2021 and implemented a strict interpretation of Islamic law -- or sharia.

"I must make it clear that force and oppression won't be used while implementing these rules," said deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat in a voice message he shared with AFP.

Israel losing its deterrent power

Says Iran amid heightened regional tensions, praises drone and missile assault by Lebanon's Hezbollah group

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday praised the drone and missile assault by Lebanon's Hezbollah group on Israel, saying its arch-foe had lost the ability to prevent such attacks amid heightened regional tensions.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Sunday said the group, which is backed by Tehran, had launched a large scale attack on Israel, targeting "the Gilot base -- the main Israeli military intelligence base".

Israel's military said the

Iran's Parliament Speaker compared the attack to the "defeat" of Israeli forces in 2006 war with Hezbollah

installation was not hit.

"The Zionist regime may be able to hide, distort or censor some facts regarding Lebanese Hezbollah operations, but it knows very well that the existing facts will not change," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani posted on X.

"The Israeli terrorist army has lost its effective offensive and deterrent power and now must defend itself against strategic strikes."

Kanani noted that the Hezbollah attack "extended deep into the occupied territories", and



said the "strategic balance has undergone fundamental changes" to the detriment of Israel.

He also criticised the United States for its "comprehensive" support for Israel, which had failed to "predict the time and place" of Hezbollah's actions.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf on Sunday compared the attack to the "defeat" of Israeli forces in the 2006 war with Hezbollah.

"Today's defeat of the regime was on a par with the defeat in the 2006 operation, and they cannot hide this defeat," he posted on X.

Iran on Sunday launched air strikes into Lebanon, saying it had destroyed "thousands" of Hezbollah rocket launchers and thwarted a major attack.

In a televised address, Nasrallah said his group had carried out a

two-phased attack, first launching "340 Katyusha rockets" at 11 military positions in northern Israel and the annexed Golan Heights.

Hezbollah militants have traded near daily cross-border fire with Israel since the offensive began in Gaza on October 7.

Fears grew of a wider regional conflagration after the killing of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur in Beirut.

Iran and its allies Hamas and Hezbollah have accused Israel of being behind both killings and vowed to seek revenge.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X late Sunday that Tehran's reaction to Haniyeh's death would be "definitive, and will be measured & well calculated".

"We do not fear escalation, yet do not seek it -- unlike Israel," he added.

Big polluters urged to pay at Pacific summit

AFP, Nuku'alofa

Emissions-belching nations were challenged to stump up for climate-related damage as a key Pacific islands summit opened yesterday, with low-lying Tuvalu declaring: "If you pollute, you should pay."

The Pacific Islands Forum got underway in Tonga's capital Nuku'alofa, with leaders hoping to draw global attention to the region's worsening climate plight.

"We really need to ensure that we continue to push for action from countries that are the most polluting," Tuvalu Climate Minister Maina Talia told AFP on the sidelines of the summit.

"Polluter pays should be on the table."

Pacific leaders will mount a renewed push later this week for a climate adaptation fund, an idea that largely hinges on financial contributions from foreign nations. They will also push to speed the transition away from oil, gas and other polluting fuel sources.

"We cannot address climate change without addressing the root cause, which is the fossil fuel industry," Talia said. "It's disaster after disaster, and we are losing the capacity to rebuild, to withstand another cyclone or another flood," he added.

US polls debate in the balance as Trump cries foul

AFP, Washington

A much-anticipated US presidential debate next month appeared in doubt yesterday as Republican candidate Donald Trump questioned whether he would participate, and both camps sparred over the use of live mics.

Trump had already balked at participating in the September 10 showdown with Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, amid ongoing quibbles.

On his Truth Social media platform Sunday, Trump accused TV broadcaster ABC of bias, posting: "I ask, why would I do the Debate against Kamala Harris on that network?"

Harris's campaign yesterday said that the two camps were locked in disagreement over whether each candidate's mic would be muted when the other spoke.

During a June 27 debate on CNN between Trump and President Joe Biden, who was the Democratic candidate at that time, microphones were turned off when it was not a candidate's turn to speak.

It was a condition negotiated by Biden, and one that was meant to apply to the September debate on ABC as well.

But Harris, who replaced Biden after his disastrous performance at the CNN debate, prefers a return to the norm of keeping microphones on.

"We believe both candidates' mics should be live throughout the full broadcast," Harris communication director Brian Fallon said in a statement.

Took 'control measures' against Philippine ships

Says China amid row over a shoal in S China Sea

AFP, Beijing

China said yesterday it took "control measures" against two Philippine Coast Guard ships that had entered waters near the disputed Sabina Shoal in the South China Sea.

The China Coast Guard accused Manila of sending two ships to "illegally barge into waters near Xianbin Jiao", using the Chinese name for the Sabina Shoal.

The ships "continued to dangerously approach normally sailing Chinese coast guard ships, inciting hype", it said in a statement.

"The Chinese coast guard took control measures against the Philippine ships in accordance with the law," it added.

Beijing claims most of the strategic South China Sea and has been involved in maritime confrontations with Manila in recent months, sparking fears of armed conflict that could draw in the United States, a Filipino military ally.

Multiple confrontations have taken place in recent days around the Sabina Shoal, located 140 kilometres west of the Philippine island of Palawan and about 1,200 kilometres from Hainan island, China's nearest major landmass.

"The Philippine Government deplores the repeated aggressive, unprofessional and illegal actions displayed by Chinese maritime forces against Philippine vessels and aircraft over the past week," Manila's National Maritime Council said. Both sides have in recent months stationed coast guard vessels near Sabina, where the Philippines fears China is about to build an artificial island.



RIOTS IN BRITAIN

Pak court acquits man charged with cybercrime

REUTERS, Lahore

A Pakistani court yesterday acquitted a local man of cybercrime offences involving the spread of fake online information which fuelled riots in Britain, his lawyer said.

The riots began after false information circulated online wrongly blaming an Islamist migrant for the killing of three young girls in a knife attack in the northern English town of Southport in late July.

Farhan Asif, who ran a web publication, was arrested in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore and charged last week by the country's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

"He has been absolved in the investigation," his lawyer Rana Rizwan Akhtar told Reuters TV, saying the investigation agency could not find any basis to prove that his client was involved in any illegal activity.

The court acquitted the accused after the agency submitted its report, he said. Asif had provided the agency with all of his social media accounts and access to all of his devices, he said. The accused had posted an article on his X social media account which said that the attacker was a Muslim immigrant, and also shared pictures of the killings, according to the case registered against him.

The riots have been characterised as "far right" by public figures from the prime minister downwards. For many people, this description suggests the disorder was somehow organised by named, specific, formal groups or political parties; and the far right's history of protest and violence by organisations like the National Front reinforces this idea.



This handout photograph taken and released by the Ukrainian Emergency Service yesterday shows rescuers working to extinguish a fire following a Russian missile attack at an undisclosed location in the Odesa region of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Durov has 'nothing to hide'

Says Telegram after France arrest

AFP, Paris

France held the Russian-born founder of Telegram Pavel Durov in custody for a second day of questioning yesterday over alleged offences related to the popular messaging app, which insisted he had "nothing to hide".

His arrest after flying into the Le Bourget airport outside Paris late Saturday is the latest extraordinary twist in the career of one of the world's most influential tech icons.

The detention of Durov, 39, was extended beyond Sunday night by the investigating magistrate who is handling the case, according to a source close to the investigation. This initial period of detention for questioning can last up to a maximum of 96 hours.

When this phase of detention ends, the judge can then decide to free Durov.