

UN urges justice in Syria, not revenge

DAMASCUS: (news desk) A week after a lightning rebel offensive toppled longtime leader Bashar al-Assad, the United Nations special envoy for Syria on Sunday called for justice to prevail, not revenge. Syrians are only now beginning to scratch the surface of the atrocities committed, after the former despot fled the country for Russia. "We need to see of course justice and accountability for crimes," UN envoy Geir Pedersen said after arriving in Damascus.

"And we need to make sure that that goes through a credible justice system, and that we don't see any revenge," Pedersen also called for "increased, immediate" aid to war-ravaged Syria, saying it had been through "an enormous... humanitarian crisis".

Back to school Calm is slowly returning to the streets of Damascus, with dozens of children streaming back to school for the first time since Assad fled. An official at one school said "no more than 30 percent" were back on Sunday, but "these numbers will rise gradually".

On the diplomatic front, US State Secretary Antony Blinken said Washington had "been in contact with HTS and with other parties," without specifying how. After meeting in Jordan, Western and Arab states along with Türkiye — a key backer of anti-Assad rebels — called for a united peaceful Syria. In a joint statement, diplomats from the United States, Türkiye, the European Union and Arab countries called for a Syrian-led transition to "produce an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government formed through a transparent process", with respect for human rights.

Israel plans to double population in occupied Golan

JERUSALEM: (news desk) Israel agreed on Sunday to double its population on the occupied Golan Heights while saying threats from Syria remained despite the moderate tone of rebel leaders who ousted President Bashar al-Assad a week ago.

"Strengthening the Golan is strengthening the State of Israel, and it is especially important at this time. We will continue to hold onto it, cause it to blossom, and settle in it," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. Israel captured most of the strategic plateau from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, annexing it in 1981. In 2019 then-president Donald Trump declared US support for Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, but the annexation has not been recognised by most countries. Syria demands Israel withdraw but Israel refuses, citing security concerns. Various peace efforts have failed. "The immediate risks to the country have not disappeared and the latest developments in Syria increase the strength of the threat — despite the moderate image that the rebel leaders claim to present," Defence Minister Israel Katz told officials examining Israel's defence budget, according to a statement. Syria's de facto leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, said on Saturday that Israel was using false pretexts to justify its attacks on Syria, but that he was not interested in engaging in new conflicts as his country focuses on rebuilding.

Bangladesh shuts feared police unit

DHAKA: (news desk) A Bangladesh commission probing abuses during the rule of toppled leader Sheikh Hasina has recommended a much-feared armed police unit be disbanded, a senior inquiry member said on Sunday.

Hasina, 77, fled by helicopter to neighbouring India on August 5 as a student-led uprising stormed the prime minister's palace in Dhaka.

Her government was accused of widespread human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial killing of hundreds of political opponents and the unlawful abduction and disappearance of hundreds more. The Commission of Inquiry into Enforced Disappearances, set up by the caretaker government, said it found initial evidence that Hasina and other ex-senior officials were involved in the enforced disappearances alleged to have been carried out by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

The RAB paramilitary police force was sanctioned by the United States in 2021, alongside seven of its senior officers, in response to reports of its culpability in some of the worst rights abuses committed during Hasina's 15-year-long rule. "RAB has never abided by the law and was seldom held accountable for its atrocities, which include enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and abductions," Nur Khan Liton, a member of the commission, said. Disbanded, a senior inquiry member said on Sunday. Hasina, 77, fled by helicopter to neighbouring India on August 5 as a student-led uprising stormed the prime minister's palace in Dhaka. Her government was accused of widespread human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial killing of hundreds of political opponents and the unlawful abduction and disappearance of hundreds more.



Workers from a cosmetics store pack products for online shoppers.—Courtesy Viet Nam News

Asian students to study medicine in Japan for free

Tokyo (news desk) THE Health, Labour and Welfare Ministry plans to cover tuition and living expenses for select international students from Asia studying at medical schools in Japan. This is the first time for the ministry to attempt such an initiative, which it is undertaking with the aim of both contributing to the international community and expanding use of Japanese medical

equipment and pharmaceuticals around Asia. The initiative is expected to start as early as fiscal 2026 and the ministry plans to accept about 20 students. The programme will be conducted on a trial basis to examine its effectiveness. Applicants will be sought via the Economic Research Institute for Asean and East Asia, an international organisation headquartered in

Indonesia and funded by Japan. Those selected will receive Japanese language training in their home countries and then come to Japan. They will study at university medical schools for six years, toward obtaining a doctor's license. The government will cover their tuition fees and all their living expenses. The ministry has earmarked Yen290 million for related spend-

ing in a supplementary budget for fiscal 2024. The ministry will decide the details going forward, such as which countries will be eligible, how to seek out applicants and which universities will accept the international students. The ministry has in mind Vietnamese students who will be able to work as doctors in their home country if they meet certain criteria.

China poised to compete globally in AI large models

Hongkong (news desk) DESPITE initial delays in the development of artificial intelligence large models, experts say China has the potential to surpass the United States in the field of "large models+" and contend for global leadership. At the 2024 Large Model Technology and Application Innovation Forum in Beijing on Thursday, Zheng Weimin, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, highlighted

two key trends in this year's AI development: foundational large models are advancing into a multimodal phase, integrating text, images, and videos, while "large models+" are seeing broad applications in industries such as finance, healthcare, automotive, and intelligent manufacturing. "Building a domestically produced large-scale system with GPUs, TPUs, and other specialized AI acceleration chips to

form a high-performance computing system is crucial," said Zheng, who also serves as a professor in the computer science department at Tsinghua University. DESPITE initial delays in the development of artificial intelligence large models, experts say China has the potential to surpass the United States in the field of "large models+" and contend for global leadership. At the 2024 Large Model Technology and Application

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Five 'Bali Nine' convicts look on as Indonesian and Australian officials sign their transfer agreement, on Sunday.

Vietnam's B2C e-commerce market in bloom

London (News desk) Vietnam's B2C (business-to-consumer) e-commerce market in 2024 has experienced growth of 18-20 per cent in the first ten months of 2024. It has been projected by 2025, the country's e-commerce market will surpass \$25 billion, according to a report from the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT). The report said 116 foreign suppliers have reg-

istered, declared and paid taxes through the electronic portal for foreign suppliers, contributing to a total revenue of VND19.8 trillion. Direct revenue from declarations via the portal this year has reached VND8.7 trillion, marking a 26pc increase compared to the same period last year. Notable platforms, such as Google, Meta (Facebook), Microsoft, TikTok, Netflix and Apple,

are included in this figure. Over the past few years, e-commerce in Vietnam has established itself as a leader in the digital economy. Despite ongoing global and regional challenges, Vietnam's e-commerce sector has continued to grow impressively, with annual growth rates averaging 18-25pc. In 2023, e-commerce saw a growth rate of 25pc, with a revenue of \$20.5 billion. It is project-

ed that in 2024, the market will exceed \$25 billion. The ministry has also launched the Vietnam Electronic Contract Development Hub, designed to help organisations individuals manage and process electronic contracts. In addition, they have developed and implemented KeyPay, a platform that facilitates the development of a national e-commerce payment system

Rare foreign-born CEO says Japan needs immigration to thrive

NIIGATA: (news desk) The Indian-born head of one of Japan's most famous snack brands has warned that the country must change its mindset and admit more immigrants to get the economy back to the glory of its boom years.

Politicians have struggled for years to recover from the so-called lost decades as a range of differing programmes have failed to kickstart growth, including an ultra-loose monetary policy and trillions of dollars in stimulus measures. And as the new government of Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba eyes a fresh drive to bring back the heyday of its global tech domination Leih Juneja, the head of rice cracker giant Kameda Seika, said he worries his adopted country has lost its edge. "Forty years ago I came to Japan because it was close to number one in GDP... it was booming," the biotech scientist said at Kameda's headquarters in Japan's rice heartland of Niigata. But at some point "Japan thought 'we have everything now'. And I think that the hungry spirit to (have) the guts to go global started disappearing a bit". In the late 1980s, Japanese firms dominated the world's top 10 companies by market capitalisation. Today not one makes the list.

Recently discovered Milan Variations by Mozart played in Shanghai

Shanghai (news desk) A piano work recently discovered to be composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91) was performed for the first time in Asia.

Eduard Lanner, director of Johann Joseph Fux Conservatory in Graz, Austria, played the Milan Variations on the 119th floor of the 632-metre-high Shanghai Tower. "The Shanghai Tower is the tallest skyscraper in China and we believe the performance of this newly found Mozart piece will take the cultural communications and friendship between China and Austria to a new height," says Yan Ming, secretary of the Communist Party of China Committee at Shanghai Tower.

Earlier this year, Carsten Wollin, a German scientist, and music historian Paul Duncan from Styria, Austria, announced that the Milan Variations, discovered in the Styrian Provincial Archives in Graz, was actually composed by Mozart, instead of some unknown musician, as it was believed to be.

The manuscript is part of the "Lannoy Collection", named after Heinrich Eduard Josef von Lannoy, a composer who gave his collection first to the Styrian Music Association, and eventually to the archives in 2005, Lanner told China Daily before the show.

Maryam invites Chinese firms to launch operations in Punjab

LAHORE: (news desk) Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Sunday invited Chinese technology, other firms to launch operations in Punjab, with representatives of several companies expressing keen interest in investment opportunities in Punjab.

Presiding over an investment conference in Guangzhou on the sixth day of her visit to China, Ms Nawaz announced plans to facilitate Chinese companies through a one-window operation, declaring Punjab as the land of opportunities for investors.

She also expressed gratitude to the conference attendees and briefed them on Punjab's economic, geographical, and business significance. She also announced on the occasion establishment of a working group, the appointment of a focal person, and the creation of a help desk to facilitate investment by Chinese companies in Punjab. The conference witnessed participation from representatives of over 60 prominent companies from China and Hong Kong. Representatives of health, artificial intelligence, agriculture, information technology, waste management, solar energy companies, and other sectors participated in the conference.

Six killed in GB road accidents

GILGIT: (news desk) Six people were killed and five injured in two separate road accidents in Skardu and Astore districts of Gilgit Baltistan on Sunday. According to Rescue 1122, in one of the accidents, a car was hit by a landslide near Malupa village of Roundu Valley in Skardu on Sunday afternoon.

The vehicle, travelling from Skardu to Shangus, was suddenly buried under the massive amount of falling debris.

Police described the scene as "horrific" as the vehicle was swept away by the landslide, leaving no chance for passengers to escape. Rescue teams were immediately dispatched to the scene to launch a search and rescue operation. Officials confirmed that five people had lost their lives in the accidents. The victims' identities have not been revealed yet, with police saying that all of them belonged to the Shangus village of Roundu. Pakistan Army, police, GB scout, Rescue 1122 and local volunteers took part in the operation to retrieve dead bodies.

The bodies of two passengers were yet to be found. In the second mishap, a jeep coming from Mirmalik in northern Astore to district headquarters skidded at Chogam, killing one person and injuring five others. According to police, eight people, including a woman, were travelling in the jeep.

Locals rescued the injured and shifted them to the District Headquarters Hospital. Four of the injured were later moved to Gilgit for medical treatment. The injured belonged to Mirmalik and Astore areas, while the deceased, a 28-year-old man, was an employee of the Waste Management Department. Locals have lamented that the region's roads have become a "deathtrap" for travellers, and many lives are lost due to landslides.

A number of locals and tourists have lost their lives on the Baltistan Road after being caught in landslides, a routine occurrence in winter.

Five of 'Bali Nine' drug ring prisoners fly home

SYDNEY: (news desk) The five remaining members of the Australian "Bali Nine" drug ring flew home on Sunday after 19 years in jail in Indonesia, ending a saga that had frayed relations between the two countries.

Indonesian police arrested the nine Australians in 2005, convicting them of attempting to smuggle more than eight kilograms of heroin off the holiday island of Bali.

The case drew global attention to Indonesia's unforgiving drug laws, with two of the gang executed

by firing squad, while the others served hefty prison sentences. "The Australian Government can confirm that Australian citizens, Matthew Norman, Scott Rush, Martin Stephens, Si Yi Chen, and Michael Czujaj have returned to Australia," Canberra said in a statement. "The men will have the opportunity to continue their personal rehabilitation and reintegration in Australia." Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the men returned in the afternoon, and he had thanked Indo-

nesian President Prabowo Subianto for his "compassion". "Australia shares Indonesia's concern about the serious problem of illicit drugs represents," Albanese said. "The government will continue to cooperate with Indonesia to counter narcotics trafficking and transnational crime," he told reporters. "These Australians spent more than 19 years in prison in Indonesia. It was time for them to come home." The Australian government did not give further details on the agreement with Jakarta.

Firing squad An Indonesian minister said the five men had left the country as prisoners but "all the responsibilities for them" had now passed to Australia. The men were accompanied on their flight home by three officials from the Australian embassy, another Indonesian official said.

They were flown from Bali to the northern Australian city of Darwin, landing around 2:42pm, Indonesia's coordinating law, human rights, immigration and corrections ministry said. Negotia-

tions over the repatriation of the men reportedly picked up after Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto met Albanese on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Peru last month.

The Australian government said it had consistently advocated for them and provided consular support to them and their families during their incarceration. It asked the media to respect their privacy. Australia's national broadcaster ABC said the men were now free, and would not have to serve

further prison time at home. The men had been given temporary accommodation and had made voluntary undertakings to continue their rehabilitation, it said. It is not uncommon for foreigners to be arrested for drug offences in Bali, which attracts millions of visitors to its palm-fringed beaches every year. Australian police came under criticism after the Bali Nine's arrests for alerting Indonesian authorities to the drug-smuggling ring despite the death penalty risk.