

News in brief

Pope to visit DR Congo, S. Sudan in early 2023



Pope Francis will visit the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan early next year, a trip previously postponed due to problems with his knee, the Vatican said yesterday. The 85-year-old pontiff will visit Kinshasa during his trip to DRC from January 31 to February 3. He will then be joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields, in heading to Juba in South Sudan from February 3-5. It will be the pontiff's fifth visit to the African continent since being elected head of the worldwide Catholic church in 2013.

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◆ North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called a key party meeting for December that will lay out the isolated country's policy direction for the year ahead, state media reported yesterday. Kim made the announcement at a Wednesday politburo gathering, according to a report carried by the official KCNA news agency, telling senior leadership that 2023 would be a "historic year". The announcement of the meeting comes after months of warnings from Seoul and Washington that Pyongyang is poised to conduct another nuclear test, the country's seventh.

North Korea to hold key party meeting in December



Landslide leaves at least two dead and dozens missing in Brazil



A landslide in the southern Brazilian state of Parana killed at least two people and left dozens missing on Wednesday, according to officials. A landslide, which followed heavy rainfall, affected Brazil's BR-376 highway, CNN reports. Authorities believe mud buried six trailers, and up to 15 vehicles on the highway, as it tumbled on a 200 meter (656 foot) stretch of the road. A fire department representative told local media that they estimate that between 30 and 50 people could be missing. The representative added that military police, firefighters, civil defense teams and rescue dogs are assisting with rescue efforts and the cleaning of embankments.

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South African president Cyril Ramaphosa is facing a possible impeachment threat over the "Farmgate" scandal.

The president has been accused of covering up a \$4m (£3.3m) theft from his farm in 2020, including kidnapping and bribing the burglars into silence. A leaked report from an independent panel has found that Ramaphosa abused his position and may have broken an anti-corruption law. He has denied wrongdoing, and said the money was from selling buffalo. The panel's findings have been handed to parliament, which is set to examine them and decide whether or not to launch impeachment proceedings next week.

South African president faces impeachment threat



Curioser & Curioser

Tunisia's spicy Harissa gets UNESCO heritage status



A shopkeeper shows a plate of Tunisian Harissa at the central market of the capital Tunis

AFP | Tunis

UNESCO yesterday added Tunisia's spicy national condiment Harissa to its list of intangible cultural heritage, saying it was part of the North African country's identity. The United Nations' cultural agency is meeting in Morocco to examine proposals for its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which aims to protect cultural traditions, practices and knowledge. "Just inscribed on the #IntangibleHeritage List: Harissa, knowledge, skills and culinary

and social practices," it tweeted yesterday.

Harissa is a paste made with sun-dried hot peppers, freshly prepared spices and olive oil, which preserves it and slightly reduces its spiciness. It is found in almost every restaurant in Tunisia and also exported worldwide.

Tunisia's application for the status notes that Harissa is "an integral part of domestic provisions and the daily culinary and food traditions of Tunisian society", usually prepared in a family or community setting.

Modi urges unity on 'greatest challenges' as India assumes G20 presidency

Reuters | Mumbai

The world must cooperate to tackle the greatest challenges of climate change, terrorism, and pandemics, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday as India began its year-long presidency of the Group of 20 (G20).

The Ukraine conflict, which started with a Russian invasion in February, dominated a two-day G20 summit in Indonesia last month, to the frustration of some members that wanted more attention on global economic woes.

"Today, we do not need to fight for our survival - our era need not be one of war. Indeed, it must not be one," Modi said in a declaration published in Indian newspapers to mark the start of the G20 presidency.

"Today, the greatest challenges we face - climate change, terrorism, and pandemics - can be solved not by fighting each other, but only by acting together."

His comment on war echoed



Narendra Modi

a remark he made to Russian President Vladimir Putin at a regional conference in September, when he told him now was not a time for war, widely interpreted as a mild rebuke of what Russia calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Modi, in the Thursday declaration, said India would aim to depoliticise the global supply of food, fertilizers and medical products, so that geo-political tensions do not lead to global disruptions.

"As in our own families, those whose needs are the greatest



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NARENDRA MODI

must always be our first concern," Modi said.

G20 members agreed at last month's summit, on the Indonesian island of Bali, to pursue efforts to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 Celsius, including speeding up efforts to phase down unabated use of coal.

India, the world's second-biggest consumer of coal, said it would prioritise a phased transition to cleaner fuels and the slashing of household consumption to achieve net zero emissions by 2070 to meet its decarbonisation pledge.

"Our G20 priorities will be shaped in consultation with not just our G20 partners, but also our fellow-travellers in the global South, whose voice often goes unheard," Modi said.

"We will encourage an honest conversation among the most powerful countries - on mitigating risks posed by weapons of mass destruction and enhancing global security."



Archaeological Survey of India workers project the logo of G20 on to Safdarjung's tomb, in New Delhi

China set to loosen COVID curbs after week of historic protests

Reuters | Beijing

China is set to announce an easing of its COVID-19 quarantine protocols in the coming days and a reduction in mass testing, sources said, a marked shift in policy after a week of the world's toughest curbs fuelled widespread protests.

Cases nationwide remain near record highs but the changes come as some cities have been lifting their lockdowns in recent days, and a top official said the ability of the virus to cause disease was weakening.

Health authorities announcing the easing in their areas have not mentioned the protests - the biggest show of civil disobedience in China for years - which ranged from candle-lit vigils in Beijing to street clashes with police in Guangzhou.

The measures due to be unveiled include a reduction in the use of mass testing and regular nucleic acid tests as well as moves to allow positive cases and close contacts to isolate at home under certain conditions, the sources familiar with the matter said.

That is a far cry from earlier protocols that led to public frustrations as entire communities were locked down, sometimes for weeks, after even just one positive case.

The frustration boiled over last week in demonstrations of public defiance unprec-



A health worker in a protective suit waits at a traffic light in Beijing



After nearly three years fighting against the epidemic, our country's medical and healthcare system has withstood the test

CHINESE VICE PREMIER SUN CHUNLAN

edented in mainland China since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012. The unrest comes as the economy is set to enter a new era of much slower growth than seen in decades.

Yesterday night, Shanghai train commuters reportedly wirelessly receiving an unsolicited document onto their phones saying that life in China would only get better if there was a full lifting of lockdown and that Xi step down - an apparently

new tactic amid a heavy police presence in some cities ahead of the weekend.

Less than 24 hours after violent protests in Guangzhou on Tuesday, authorities in at least seven districts of the sprawling manufacturing hub, said they were lifting temporary lockdowns. One district said it would allow schools, restaurants and businesses including cinemas to reopen.

Cities including Chongqing and Zhengzhou also announced easings.

The sense of official momentum towards a landmark shift built yesterday as Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, who oversees COVID efforts, told a meeting of frontline experts that the Omicron variant was weakening in its ability to cause disease, allowing China to improve prevention efforts.

Six let

Spain tightens security

● US embassy latest target in spate of letter bombs

● Ukraine embassy official slightly injured by one device

● Defence ministry, arms manufacturer, air base also targeted

Reuters | Madrid

Bomb disposal experts defused a letter bomb at the US Embassy in Madrid yesterday, the sixth such device sent to high-profile targets in a wave that prompted Spain to step up security and vow not to be deterred from supporting Ukraine.

The campaign began with a package sent to Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Nov. 24, spurring Madrid to tighten security around public buildings. Since Wednesday, similar devices have also been sent to the defence ministry, an air force base, a weapons manufacturer and the Ukrainian embassy - where a security officer was slightly injured.

Defence Minister Margari-

Philippines new ways to exploit Sea resources

Reuters | Manila

The Philippines must find a way to explore for oil and gas in the South China Sea even without a deal with China, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said yesterday, emphasising his country's right to exploit energy reserves in the contested waterway.

"That's a big thing for us, that is why we need to fight (for what is ours) and take advantage if there really is oil there," Marcos told reporters.

Talks over joint energy exploration between Manila and Beijing in the South China Sea had been terminated, the previous government said in June, citing constitutional constraints and issues of sovereignty.

"That's the roadblock, it is hard to see how we can resolve that. I think there might be other ways so it does not have to be G-to-G (government-to-government)," Marcos said.

Marcos' remarks came after his foreign affairs secretary said in August Manila was open to new talks with China on oil and gas exploration and that a deal with China or any other country must comply with Philippine laws.

The Philippines relies heavily on imported fuel for its energy needs, making it vulnerable to supply shocks and rising oil prices, which have helped push up inflation to a near 14-year high.

During a three-day visit last week, US Vice President Kamala