

Roman Emperor Septimius Severus dies in Eboracum (York) in England, leaving the Roman Empire in the hands of his two quarrelsome sons, Caracalla and Geta

1st US electoral college chooses George Washington as President and John Adams as Vice President

The Palestine National Congress appoints Yasser Arafat chairman of the PLO



Mark Zuckerberg launches Facebook from his Harvard dormitory room

# Joe Biden postpones China trip following spy balloon discovery

President Biden's trip to China is postponed after a spy balloon is tracked across the US



A balloon flies in the sky over Billings, Montana

It was best not to proceed with the trip at this time.

Blinken's long-anticipated meetings with senior Chinese officials had been seen in both countries as a way to find some areas of common ground amid major disagreements over Taiwan, human rights, China's claims in the South China Sea, North Korea, Russia's war in Ukraine, trade policy and climate change.

Although the trip, which was agreed to in November by President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping at a summit in Indonesia, had not been formally announced, officials in both Beijing and Washington had been talking in recent days about Blinken's imminent arrival.

The meetings were to begin on Sunday and go through Monday. The discovery of the balloon

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The official said the spy balloon was trying to fly over the Montana missile fields, but the US has assessed that it has "limited" value in terms of providing intelligence it couldn't obtain by other technologies, such as spy satellites

was announced on Thursday by Pentagon officials who said one of the places it was spotted was over the state of Montana, which is home to one of America's three nuclear missile silo fields at Malmstrom Air Force Base. A senior defence official said the US prepared fighter jets, in-

cluding F-22s, to shoot down the balloon if ordered. The Pentagon ultimately recommended against it, noting that even as the balloon was over a sparsely populated area of Montana, its size would create a debris field large enough that it could have put people at risk.

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Nevertheless, the discovery alarmed many in Washington, leading to several protests lodged with Chinese officials and attracting strong criticism of the administration particularly from Republican members of Congress who have advocating taking a tougher stance with China.

China, which angrily denounces surveillance attempts by the US and others over areas it considers to be its territory and once forced down an American spy plane, offered a generally muted reaction to the Pentagon announcement.

Taliban detain Afghan educator who spoke out on women's school ban



Ismail Mashal  
AFP | Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities have "beaten and detained" an academic who voiced outrage on live television against their ban on women's university education, his aide said.

Veteran journalism lecturer Ismail Mashal caused a storm by tearing his degree certificates to shreds on TV in December, protesting the edict ending women's higher education.

In recent days, domestic channels showed Mashal carting books around Kabul and offering them to passers-by.

"Mashal was mercilessly beaten and taken away in a very disrespectful manner by members of the Islamic Emirate," Mashal's aide Farid Ahmad Fazli told AFP, referring to the Taliban government.

Sudan warns election process stalls



President Salva Kiir, center-right, after arriving

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For just as the Nile leaves its sources to begin its course, so the course of history will leave behind the enemies of peace and bring renown to those who are true peacemakers

POPE FRANCIS

religious leaders at the airport in the capital, Juba. Francis' motorcade route was lined with Christians, Muslims, and traditional dancers waving Vatican, South Sudanese and British flags.

"The pope is closest to God," said Poni Jadalla, 45, as she waited to welcome Francis on the first-ever papal visit to the country. "Let the pope give us peace so that this country can develop and no more bloodshed."

Brazil to sink warship dubbed '30,000-tonne toxic package'

AFP | Brasilia

Brazil plans to sink a decommissioned aircraft carrier that has been towed around the Atlantic for months with a damaged hull, drawing criticism from environmentalists, who say it is packed with toxic materials.

The navy and defense ministry said in a statement Wednesday that the six-decade-old warship, the Sao Paulo, would be scuttled, after trying in vain to find a port willing to welcome it.

"Given the situation and the growing risk of towing (the ship), in light of the deteriorating buoyancy of the hull and the inevitability of a spontaneous, uncontrolled sinking, there is



The aircraft carrier 'Sao Paulo' is seen in February 1994, when it belonged to France and was known as the 'Foch' (file photo)

no option but to jettison it in a planned, controlled sinking," it said.

Environmentalists attacked the decision, saying the aircraft

carrier contains tonnes of asbestos, heavy metals and other toxic materials that could leach into the water and pollute the marine food chain.

The warship took part in France's first nuclear tests in the Pacific in the 1960s, and deployments in Africa, the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia from the 1970s to 1990s

The director of the Basel Action Network (BAN), Jim Puckett, accused Brazil's navy of "gross negligence."

"If they proceed with dumping the very toxic vessel into the wilderness of the Atlantic Ocean, they will violate the terms of three international environmental treaties," he said in a statement.

Pakistani troops kill 2 militants in raid near Afghan border

AP | Islamabad

Troops raided a militant hideout in a former Pakistani Taliban stronghold near the border with Afghanistan yesterday, triggering a shootout that killed two insurgents, the military said.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif summoned the country's opposition leader to forge a response to the recent surge in violence, including a mosque bombing that killed 101 people.

Troops yesterday recovered a cache of weapons in a militant hideout in North Waziristan, a district of the northwestern



Children light candle as they with other take part in a candle light vigil for the victims of Monday's suicide bombing

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said in a statement. The militants killed during the

raid had been involved in past attacks on security forces, it added. The statement provided

no further details, and the identities of the slain militants were not immediately known.

Troops routinely carry out such raids to trace and arrest the Pakistani Taliban, who are also known as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.

The Pakistani Taliban are a separate group but are allies of the Afghan Taliban, who seized power in Afghanistan a year ago as US and NATO troops were in the final stages of their pull-out. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has emboldened the Pakistani Taliban, who have stepped up attacks since November when they ended the ceasefire with the government.



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TWEETS

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Together, we are bringing light to Ukraine! Ukrainians can exchange their old bulbs at the post office for energy-efficient LED bulbs. The EU is gladly providing 35 million of them. Every kW of energy saved is precious to counter Russia's energy war.

@vonderleyen

02



The Ukrainian people have made a clear choice for freedom, democracy, and rule of law. And we in the EU have also made a clear decision. Your future is with us. Your destiny is our destiny. That's why we are here today. Standing by your side. @ZelenskyyUa #EUUkraine

@eucopresident

03



Good meeting with His Majesty @KingAbdullahII. We discussed the strategic U.S.-Jordan partnership and regional issues, and I re-affirmed the importance of upholding the historic status quo at Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

@SecBlinken

04



At the current rate, it may take hundreds of years before women & girls have the same rights as men. The world cannot wait this long. We need gender equality, everywhere, now.

@antonioguterres

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)