

News in brief

Rwanda attacked Congo troops, backed rebels: experts for UN



Rwandan troops have attacked soldiers inside DR Congo and aided the M23 rebel group, according to a report by independent experts for the UN. The findings follow months of deepening tensions between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda over the notorious M23. The DRC has repeatedly accused Rwanda of backing the militia, which has captured swathes of territory in recent months. Kigali has repeatedly denied any involvement. But according to a 131-page report by experts for the UN Security Council, Rwanda has launched military interventions inside Congolese territory since at least November 2021.

The Taliban said yesterday they have no

Taliban say 'no information' about Al Qaeda chief Zawahiri in Afghanistan

knowledge of Ayman al-Zawahiri's presence in Afghanistan, days after US President Joe Biden announced the Al-Qaeda chief's killing by a drone strike in Kabul. Zawahiri's assassination is the biggest blow to Al-Qaeda since US special forces killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, and calls into question the Taliban's promise not to harbour militant groups. "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has no information about Ayman al-Zawahiri's arrival and stay in Kabul," said an official statement -- the Taliban's first mention of his name since Biden's announcement.



Volcano erupts near Iceland's capital in seismic hot spot



A volcano has erupted on a mountain near Iceland's capital Reykjavik after days of rising earthquake activity in the area, the Icelandic Meteorological Office (IMO) said. Images and livestreams by local news outlets MBL and RUV showed lava and smoke spewing from a fissure in the ground on the side of the Fagradalsfjall mountain, which last year saw an eruption that lasted six months. Tourists and residents should avoid the area due to poisonous gases, although there was no immediate risk of damage to critical infrastructure, the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management said in a statement.

Former Venezuela opposition lawmaker Juan Requesens was sentenced

Venezuela opposition leader sentenced to 8 years in prison

to eight years in prison for alleged involvement in the 2018 explosion of two drones at an event attended by President Nicolas Maduro, his lawyer said yesterday. Requesens' family and opposition leader Juan Guaido consider him a political prisoner and have denied his involvement in the case. Requesens was detained for about two years between 2018 and 2020 in the case, which stems from explosions that rocked a military event where Maduro was giving a speech.



Blasts ring out as fires rage in Berlin forest

Reuters | Berlin

A huge fire broke out yesterday in a popular forest in western Berlin next to a police munitions storage site, sending plumes of smoke into the skies and setting off intermittent explosions.

The army sent in a tank aimed at evacuating munitions at the affected storage site as well as remote-controlled de-mining robots, while drones were circling the air to help assess the emergency.

The situation is "extremely extraordinary with munitions," said Berlin fire brigade spokesman Thomas Kirstein, adding that it was "under control and there was no danger for Berliners."

The fire was however expected to last for some time, he said.

Firefighters called to the site in the middle of the night were confronted with intermittent blasts that sent debris flying and hindered their work.

They have so far been able to begin tackling only two of the four hotspots across the affected area of 15,000 square metres (161,500 square feet), as explosions at the munitions store were still rocking the area.

No one has been hurt by the fires, which came on a day when a new heatwave was due to envelop Germany.

Officials have built a security cordon to allow firefighters to start working around a kilometre from the ammunition storage zone.

The store holds munitions uncovered by police, but also unexploded World War 2-era ordnance which is regularly dug up during construction works.

Police said they were investi-



Smoke rises in Berlin's Grunewald forest in Berlin, Germany

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Massive explosions were heard in the morning from the site where old ammunition from World War II, fireworks and explosive ordnance is stored and controlled explosions are carried out

gating what set off the fire.

Authorities appealed for the public to avoid the forest, popular with both locals and tourists, as several regional rail lines have been halted.

But authorities said no firefighting choppers were available as they were already in use to calm forest fires in eastern Germany.

Heatwave

The German capital is rarely hit by forest fires, even though its 29,000 hectares of forests make it one of the greenest cities in the world.

Brandenburg, the region surrounding Berlin, as well as parts of eastern Germany have for days been battling forest fires.

Scientists say climate change is making heatwaves around the world more frequent and more intense, which increases the risk of fires.

Temperatures are expected to climb as high as 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) across parts of Germany yesterday. In Berlin, they are predicted to reach 38C.

After a scorching yesterday, heavy thunderstorms are due to sweep into the country from the west on Friday, the German weather service said.

A cold front is predicted to bring temperatures down by more than 10 degrees overnight in western Germany, falling to around 20-25 degrees on Friday.

ASEAN warns of Taiwan 'miscalculation' as tension simmers at meeting

Reuters | Phnom Penh

Southeast Asian countries warned yesterday of miscalculations in the Taiwan Strait and "serious confrontation" among major powers, while China's foreign minister walked out before a gala dinner at a high-level meeting in Cambodia.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is hosting a meeting of 27 countries, including the United States, at a gathering so far overshadowed by developments around Taiwan following US House of



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in Phnom Penh

Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's solidarity trip this week.

It warned the tensions could lead to "open conflicts and unpredictable consequences", and called for maximum restraint.

"ASEAN stands ready to play a constructive role in facilitating peaceful dialogue between all parties," the bloc said in a statement.

China deployed scores of planes and fired live missiles near Taiwan yesterday in its biggest-ever drills in the Taiwan Strait, underlining China's fury over Pelosi's visit to the self-ruled island.

There was diplomatic discord also in Cambodia's capital

Phnom Penh, where foreign ministers of China, the United States and Japan were all present in the same venue for bilateral meetings with the ASEAN grouping.

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken have refused to meet each other in Phnom Penh, while planned talks between Wang and Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi were cancelled, with Beijing citing displeasure over a G7 statement urging it to resolve tension over Taiwan peacefully. Wang yesterday called Pelosi's visit "manic, irresponsible and highly irrational", state-run CCTV reported.

Furious Taiwan

Chinese military fires

Taiwan says various government websites hacked

China angry at US and Taiwan, calls drills internal matter

Exercises around the island scheduled to run through Sunday

Reuters | Taipei

China fired multiple missiles near Taiwan yesterday in its biggest ever military drills in the Taiwan Strait, a day after US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the self-ruled island.

The exercises began at midday and included live-firing waters to the north, south and east of Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own. They brought volatility in the area to its worst in a quarter century.

China's military said at around 3:30 p.m. (0730 GMT) it had completed multiple firings of conventional missiles in waters off east Taiwan as part of planned exercises in six different zones set to run until noon on Sunday.

Taiwan's defence ministry said 11 Chinese Dongfeng ballistic missiles had been fired in waters around the island. The last time

Brittney Griner

Biden says: It's unacceptable

Reuters | Moscow

A Russian court sentenced U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner to nine years in prison yesterday after finding her guilty of deliberately bringing cannabis-infused vape cartridges into Russia, a ruling that President Joe Biden called "unacceptable."

Griner was arrested in mid-February, and her case threw the Texan athlete into the geopolitical maelstrom triggered when President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, propelling US-Russian relations to a new post-Cold War low.

Griner's sentencing could now pave the way for a US-Russian prisoner swap that would include the 31-year-old athlete and an imprisoned Russian who was once a prolific arms dealer.

Griner had admitted having the vape cartridges containing hashish oil but said it was an honest mistake. Before the verdict, she pleaded with a Russian judge not to "end her life" with a harsh prison sentence, before breaking

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	93,593,214	226,319	585,736,210
2 India	44,087,037	116,068	
3 France	33,960,131	154,888	
4 Brazil	33,927,328		6,428,840
5 Germany	31,119,199	34,210	
6 UK	23,368,899	27,100	Recovered: 556,290,238
7 Italy	21,213,559	29,272	
8 S. Korea	20,160,154	33,885	New cases +602,377
9 Russia	18,653,867	33,875	
10 Turkey	15,889,495	86,893	New deaths +1,092
11 Japan	13,344,898	43,967	
12 Spain	13,245,996	18,656	
13 Vietnam	10,785,122	31,346	
14 Argentina	9,560,307	13,719	

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	515,645		24,613		442,182	48,850
Saudi Arabia	810,583	+189	9,257	+2	796,701	4,625
UAE	995,777	+1,084	2,335		974,601	18,841
Kuwait	653,730		2,559		647,555	3,616
Oman	395,737		4,260		384,669	6,808
Qatar	412,137	+732	681		404,665	6,791

“We oppose any unilateral efforts to change the status quo, especially by force. We, and countries around the world, believe that escalation serves no and could have unintended consequences that serve no one's interests, including ASEAN members, and including China”

ANTONY BLINKEN