

News in brief

Taiwan holds military drill after China repeats threats



Taiwan's army held another live-fire drill yesterday after Beijing ended its largest-ever military exercises around the island, as it repeated threats to bring the self-ruled democracy under its control. Beijing has raged at a trip to Taiwan last week by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- the highest-ranking elected American official to visit in decades -- staging days of air and sea drills around the island that raised tensions to their highest level in years. Taiwan has accused China of using the Pelosi visit as an excuse to kickstart drills that would allow it to rehearse for an invasion.

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Troops in Cameroon's Northwest Region have "summarily killed" at least 10 people in a crackdown against anglophone separatists, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday.

Cameroon troops 'summarily killed' 10 in crackdown: HRW



Its report is the latest in a string of allegations by rights monitors in the battle between security forces and English-speaking militants demanding home rule in francophone-majority Cameroon. "Cameroonian soldiers summarily killed at least 10 people and carried out a series of other abuses between April 24 and June 12, during counter-insurgency operations in the Northwest Region," HRW said.

Sweden agrees to extradite man to Turkey in wake of NATO deal

Sweden's government has decided to extradite a man to Turkey wanted for fraud, it said yesterday, the first case since Turkey demanded a number of people extradited in return for allowing Stockholm to formally apply for NATO membership.

NATO ally Turkey lifted its veto over Finland and Sweden's bid to join the Western alliance in June after weeks of tense negotiations where Ankara accused the two Nordic countries of harbouring what Turkey says are militants of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). As part of the deal, Turkey submitted a list of people it wanted Sweden to extradite, but has since expressed frustration over the lack of progress. The man, in his 30s, would be the first known case of an extradition to Turkey since the deal was struck.

A prominent Taliban cleric, Sheikh Rahimullah Haqqani, was killed in an attack in Kabul yesterday, according to an intelligence official.

Taliban cleric killed in blast in Kabul

Abdul Rahman, the head of intelligence for the district in the Afghan capital where the blast took place, confirmed the death. The attack took place in a religious seminary in the Afghan capital when a man who had previously lost his leg had detonated explosives hidden in a plastic artificial leg. It was not immediately clear who was behind the blast.

Freetown in shock after dozens killed in Sierra Leone protests

Dozens died in anti-government protests in Sierra Leone, police and other sources said yesterday, sharply raising the death toll from the previous day's clashes as shocked citizens stayed mostly behind closed doors in the capital Freetown.

Six police officers and at least 21 civilians were killed, the sources said, as hundreds took to the streets in frustration at economic hardship and a perceived failure by the government to cushion the impact of rising prices.

San Francisco metro system hires bird of prey to scare pigeons away



A hawk is seen at San Francisco metro station

Reuters | San Francisco

Metro system riders in California's San Francisco Bay Area may have noticed a new station guard in recent months.

A 5-year-old Harris's hawk named Pac-Man has taken up the perch at El Cerrito del Norte station, where he's on the look out - not for fare evaders, but pigeons.

Ricky Ortiz, a falconer with Falcon Force and Pac-Man's handler, began patrolling with the bird at the station this summer, contracting with the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, or BART, to keep the pigeons at bay and protect commuters from pigeon poop.

The team patrols three days a week, starting their day at the bottom level entrance before scoping out the platforms, scaring away any pigeons who are resting on a ledge or on the interior scaffolding of the station.

So far Ortiz has noticed a big difference.

"There was probably less than half of the pigeons here after the week of us flying," he said.

Ortiz tries to keep Pac-Man from feasting on the pigeons or local rodents, instead giving him snacks throughout the day to keep his feathery friend happy on the job.

Satellite pictures at Russian air base

Satellite images show three craters, eight destroyed planes; Ukraine says Russian air strikes double from last week

Ukraine says Russian air strikes double from last week

Reuters | Kyiv

Satellite pictures released yesterday showed devastation at a Russian air base in Crimea, hit in an attack that suggested Kyiv may have obtained new long-range strike capability with potential to change the course of the war.

Pictures released by independent satellite firm Planet Labs showed three near-identical craters where buildings at Russia's Saki air base had been struck with apparent precision. The base, on the southwest coast of Crimea, had suffered extensive fire damage with the burnt-out husks of at least eight destroyed warplanes clearly visible.

Russia has denied aircraft were damaged and said explosions seen at the base on Tuesday were accidental.

Ukraine has not publicly claimed responsibility for the attack or said exactly how it was carried out.

"Officially, we are not confirming or denying anything; there are numerous scenarios for what might have happened... bearing in mind that there were several epicentres of explosions at exactly the same time," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak told Reuters in a message.



A satellite image shows destroyed Saky air base in Crimea

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UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER MYKHAILO PODOLYAK

Western military experts said the scale of the damage and the apparent precision of the strike suggested a powerful new capability with potentially important implications.

Russia, which seized and annexed Crimea in 2014, uses the

peninsula as the base for its Black Sea fleet and as the main supply route for its invasion forces occupying southern Ukraine, where Kyiv is planning a counter-offensive in coming weeks.

"I'm not an intel analyst, but it doesn't look good," Mark Hertling, a former commander of U.S. ground forces in Europe, wrote on Twitter, linking to an image of the devastation at the Russian base.

"I am. It's very good," tweeted back his fellow retired four-star American general, Michael Hayden, former head of the CIA and National Security Agency.

The Institute for the Study of War think tank said Ukrainian officials were framing the Crimea strike as "the start of Ukraine's counteroffensive in the south, suggesting that the Ukrainian military expects intense fighting

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	94,348,507	1,060,755	592,730,282
2 India	44,206,996	526,879	
3 France	34,169,281	152,990	
4 Brazil	34,096,935	680,852	6,447,249
5 Germany	31,439,645	145,394	
6 UK	23,420,826	186,087	Recovered: 564,628,529
7 Italy	21,428,602	173,701	
8 S. Korea	20,983,169	25,441	New cases +621,011
9 Russia	18,796,472	382,954	
10 Turkey	16,295,817	99,678	New deaths +1,205
11 Japan	14,861,375	34,323	
12 Spain	13,280,557	111,339	
13 Vietnam	11,353,573	43,095	
14 Australia	9,737,319	12,655	

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	811,642	+130	9,265	+1	798,381	3,996
UAE	1,002,306	+861	2,339	+1	981,065	18,902
Kuwait	655,854		2,562		652,250	1,042
Oman	397,231		4,260		384,669	8,302
Qatar	417,390	+754	681		410,744	5,965

Wildfires rage, farmers struggle as another heatwave bakes western Europe

Reuters | Paris

Wildfires tore through parts of France, Spain and Portugal yesterday as heatwaves baked Europe and the head of the European Space Agency urged immediate action to fight climate change.

More than 1,000 firefighters, backed by water-bombing planes, battled for a third day a "monster" blaze that has forced thousands from their homes and scorched thousands of hectares of forest in France's southwestern Gironde region.

With a dangerous cocktail of blistering temperatures, tinder-box conditions and wind fanning the flames, President Emmanuel Macron said several European Union nations were deploying reinforcements to help beat back the blaze.

"It's an ogre, a monster," said Gregory Allione from the French firefighters body FNSPF said.

Heatwaves, floods and crumbling glaciers in recent weeks have heightened concerns over climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather across the globe.



flames consume trees at a forest fire in Saint Magne, south of Bordeaux, south western France

The head of the European Space Agency, Josef Aschbacher, said rising land temperatures and shrinking rivers as measured from space left no doubt about the toll on agriculture and other industries from climate change.

ESA's Copernicus Sentinel-3 satellite series has measured "extreme" land surface temperatures of more than 45C (113F) in Britain, 50C in France and 60C in Spain in recent weeks.

"It's pretty bad. We have seen extremes that have not been observed before," Aschbacher said.

Climate change risks

With successive heatwaves baking Europe this summer, bringing record temperatures and unprecedented droughts, renewed focus has been placed on climate change risks to farming, industry and livelihoods.

Severe drought is set to slash the European Union's maize harvest by 15%, dropping it to a 15-year low, just as Europeans contend with higher food prices as a result of lower-than-normal grain exports from Russia and Ukraine.

Swiss army helicopters have been drafted in to airlift water to thirsty cows, pigs and goats sweltering under a fierce sun in the country's Alpine meadows.

In France, suffering its harshest drought on record, trucks are delivering water to dozens of villages where taps have run dry, nuclear power stations have received waivers to keep pumping hot discharge water into rivers, and farmers warn a shortage of fodder may lead to milk shortages.



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