

Yoshihide Suga named Japan's new prime minister

AFP News

Yoshihide Suga became Japan's new prime minister on Wednesday, with the former chief cabinet secretary expected to stick closely to policies championed by Shinzo Abe during his record-breaking tenure.

Suga, 71, won an easy victory in a parliamentary vote, where his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) holds a commanding majority.

He bowed deeply as lawmakers applauded his win, but made no immediate comment. He is not expected to speak until late Wednesday, when he gives his first press conference as prime minister.

Suga's new cabinet was announced shortly after the vote, with several ministers keeping their jobs, including Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Finance Minister Taro Aso.

Abe's brother Nobuo Kishi, who was adopted by his uncle as a child and carries his surname, is the new defence minister, replacing Taro Kono, who becomes administrative reform minister.

Suga is seen as a continuity candidate and has said his run was inspired by a desire to pursue Abe's policies, although analysts warned of challenges ahead.

Abe formally resigned earlier Wednesday along with his cabinet, ending his record run in office with a year left in his mandate.

He was forced out by a recurrence of ulcerative colitis, a bowel disease that has long plagued him.



Suga is a long-time supporter of and advisor to Abe, who urged him to seek a second term

29 German police suspended for sharing pictures of Hitler

Reuters | Dusseldorf, Germany

Twenty-nine police officers have been suspended in Germany for sharing pictures of Adolf Hitler and doctored depictions of refugees in gas chambers on their mobile phones, officials in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) said yesterday.

They are also accused of using far-right chatrooms where extremist content, such as Swastikas and other Nazi symbols, that breaches the German constitution was shared.

Jerusalem Al-Aqsa mosque compound to close over virus

● The mosque will remain closed for three weeks starting Friday

● Closure coincides with a three-week lockdown to be imposed by Israel

AFP News

Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, will be closed from Friday following a spike in coronavirus cases, the authority that administers the city's Muslim holy places announced.

With cases of the virus on the rise in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the Waqf authority held an emergency meeting with health officials.

Waqf members decided to "suspend the entry of worshippers starting from Friday afternoon (September 18) for a period of three weeks".

"We hope that citizens will understand this procedure, in order to preserve their health and wellbeing," Waqf member Hatem Abdel Qader told AFP.

The closure coincides with a three-week lockdown to be imposed by Israel, which controls the entrances of the compound.

The call to prayer will continue to ring out across Jeru-



Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, is to close for three weeks from Friday in only the second such move by religious authorities since 1967

salem's Old City, Qader said, while Waqf employees will be allowed to pray at the site.

Jordan is the custodian of the compound, known by Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif, or Holy Sanctuary, and as the Temple

Mount by Jews.

It is only the second time that the Waqf has decided to close the compound since Israel occupied east Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967.

Israel has previously blocked access to the flashpoint site, which is a focus of Palestinian aspirations for statehood.

The Waqf shut the compound at the onset of the pandemic in March, when sweeping closures upended religious life in a way not seen for centuries.

Israeli authorities have reported nearly 167,000 coronavirus cases, with 1,147 deaths.

In the occupied West Bank some 214 people have died from the virus and more than 30,200 cases have been registered by Palestinian authorities.



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WAQF MEMBER HATEM ABDEL QADER

Mitra the robot helps COVID patients in India speak to loved ones

Reuters | New Delhi

A hospital in India has deployed a customer-service robot to patrol its wards, connecting coronavirus patients to friends and relatives.

Mitra, meaning "friend" in Hindi, is best known for interacting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an event in 2017.

Its piercing eyes are equipped with facial recognition technology to help it recall people it has previously interacted with. A tablet attached to Mitra's chest allows patients to see loved ones, as well as medical staff unable to access the wards.

"It takes a lot of time to recover, and during this time, when patients need their families the most, they are unable to visit," said Dr Arun Lakhanpal, a doctor at the Yatharth Super Speciality Hospital in Noida Extension, a satellite



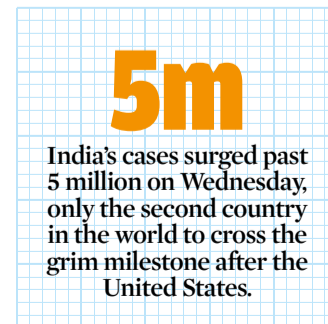
A patient speaks to his family members, using a robot named 'Mitra' at a hospital in Noida

city of the capital New Delhi. Mitra is mainly used by patients who are not able to communicate using their phones.

"We mainly discuss your health," said Makhanlal Qazi, a retired government bureaucrat and coronavirus patient who has used the robot to communicate with relatives. "I came here on Friday and now I have started feeling better. I am feeling very happy now."

The robot, developed by Bengaluru-based start-up Invento Robotics, cost the hospital 1 million rupees (\$13,600), according to Yatharth Tyagi, director of the company that runs the hospital.

Mitra is also being used for remote consultations with specialists to reduce their risk of becoming infected, he added.



News in brief

◆ **Barbados wants to remove Britain's Queen Elizabeth as its head of state and become a republic, the Caribbean island nation's government has said, reviving a plan mooted several times in the past.** A former British colony that gained independence in 1966, Barbados has maintained a formal link with the British monarchy as have some other countries that were once part of the British empire. "The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind," said Barbados Governor General Sandra Mason, delivering a speech on behalf of the country's Prime Minister Mia Mottley.



Barbados says it will remove Queen Elizabeth as head of state

◆ **Myanmar authorities are racing to build a field hospital in the commercial capital of Yangon to cope with a surge of coronavirus infections that doctors fear threatens to overwhelm the country's fragile health system.** The Southeast Asian nation reported 307 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, its highest daily toll since the start of the pandemic



Myanmar races to build field hospital

in March, and another 134 on Wednesday morning, taking the total to 3,636 cases and 39 deaths.

◆ **Hurricane Sally yesterday made its final, grinding approach to the US Gulf Coast, inching toward a daybreak landfall as an upgraded Category**



Hurricane Sally takes aim at US Alabama-Florida border area

Two storm after winds intensified overnight. Winds were clocked at 100 miles per hour (160 km per hour), able to cause extensive damage, according to the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale. It also poses the risk of "life-threatening flash flooding" with more than 2 feet (60 cm) of rain landing on some areas as it creeps inland, the National Hurricane Center said.

◆ **The Philippines continues to negotiate supply deals with a wide range of COVID-19 vaccine makers, its health ministry said on Wednesday, despite its president scolding Western firms and saying he wanted Chinese and Russian vaccines.** "We are still continuously negotiating," Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire told Reuters in a text message. "No vaccine manufacturers have 'formally' asked for pre-payment, though there have been insinuations during the discussions." President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday lashed



Philippines says engaging Western pharma firms, despite Duterte anger

out at Western vaccine manufacturers for seeking advance payment or a reservation fee for vaccines that are still under clinical trials

◆ **Vietnam is readying plans to evacuate up to half a million people as it braces for a tropical storm expected to make landfall in the Southeast Asian country's central coastline later this week.** Tropical Storm Noul is gaining strength and forecast to make landfall later on Friday with wind speed of up to 135 km per hour (84 mph), according to the government's weather agency. The tropical storm was more than 200 km southeast of the Parcel islands in the South China Sea as of late Wednesday.

Vietnam plans to evacuate 500,000 as tropical storm Noul nears

