

News in brief

Mexican president pitches regional block similar to EU

Latin American and Caribbean nations should aspire to a regional block



similar to the European Union, Mexico's president said yesterday, in a bid to wrest diplomatic influence away from the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS). The host of the summit, President Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, told nearly 20 presidents and prime ministers attending the meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) at the gathering's opening ceremony that the block could better boost the region's inequality-stricken economies as well as confront health and other crisis.

Thousands of hunters marched in France yesterday to defend "rural values" and traditional bird hunting which the country's top administrative court has banned.

Thousands march in France against traditional hunting ban



In the medieval town of Mont-de-Marsan in southwest France, authorities said at least 13,000 people protested to the sound of hunting horns and firecrackers. Wearing bright orange -- the colour of hunters' jackets -- the demonstrators marched under driving rain. Further up in Brittany, a protest also took place in Redon, and others were planned elsewhere.

Notre-Dame's restoration ready to start as safety work completed

Work to shore up the Notre-Dame de Paris has been finished, allowing restoration to start at the cathedral two years after a fire destroyed the attic and sent its spire crashing through the vaults below, officials said.



Soon after the April 2019 blaze, President Emmanuel Macron said the cathedral - which dates back to the 12th century - would be rebuilt and later promised to get it reopened to worshippers by 2024, when France hosts the Olympic Games.

At least three people were killed and about 20 wounded in a series of blasts in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad yesterday, two sources in the city said.

At least three dead in blasts in Afghanistan's Jalalabad



The fatalities occurred during a series of five blasts, the sources, who said they had received information from hospitals and eyewitnesses, said. One source said members of the Taliban were among the casualties. The second said the bombs targeted Taliban vehicles.

France says to work with India to promote multilateral order

France's foreign affairs minister agreed with his Indian counterpart to work on a programme to promote "a truly multilateral international order," the French foreign ministry said.

Jean-Yves Le Drian and Subrahmanyam Jaishankar also agreed during a call to deepen their strategic partnership, "based on a relationship of political trust between two great sovereign nations of the Indo-Pacific," the ministry said in a statement.

In escalation over submarine deal, France recalls envoys from US and Australia

Reuters | Paris

France plunged into an unprecedented diplomatic crisis with the United States and Australia after it recalled its ambassadors from both countries over a trilateral security deal which sank a French-designed submarine contract with Canberra.

The rare decision taken by French President Emmanuel Macron was made due to the "exceptional gravity" of the matter, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a statement.

On Thursday, Australia said it would scrap a \$40 billion deal signed in 2016 for France's Naval Group to build a fleet of conventional submarines and would instead build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines with US and British technology after striking a trilateral security partnership. France called it a stab in the back.

A diplomatic source in France said it was the first time Paris had recalled its own ambassadors in this way.

Australia said yesterday morning it regretted the recall, and that it valued the relationship with France and would keep engaging with Paris on other issues.

"Australia understands France's deep disappointment with our decision, which was taken in accordance with our clear and communicated national security interests," a spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne said in a statement.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that France was a 'vital ally' and that the United States would be engaged in coming days to resolve the differences.

The French foreign ministry statement made no mention of Britain, but the diplomatic



French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian attends a joint news conference at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany

acceptable behaviour between allies and partners," he said in a statement.

He added that the consequences "directly affect the vision we have of our alliances, of our partnerships and of the importance of the Indo-Pacific for Europe."

Low point

The row marks the lowest point in relations between Australia and France since 1995, when Canberra protested France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific and recalled its ambassador for consultations.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday rejected French criticism that it had not been warned about the new deal, and said he had raised the possibility in talks with the French president that Australia might scrap the Naval Group deal.

Morrison insisted he had told Macron in June that Australia had revised its thinking.

"I made it very clear, we had a lengthy dinner there in Paris, about our very significant concerns about the capabilities of conventional submarines to deal with the new strategic environment we're faced with," he told 5aa Radio.

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source said France considered Britain had joined the deal in an opportunistic manner.

"We don't need to hold consultations with our (British) ambassador to know what to make of it or to draw any conclusions," the source added.

Le Drian said the deal was unacceptable.

"The cancellation (of the project) ... and the announcement of a new partnership with the United States meant to launch studies on a possible future co-operation on nuclear-powered submarines, constitute unac-

Girls exc
seconda

Government announce

Primary schools have already reopened, with boys and girls mostly attending separate classes and some women teachers returning to work

AFP | Kabul

Girls were excluded from returning to secondary school in Afghanistan yesterday, after the country's new Taliban rulers ordered only boys and male teachers back to the classroom.

The hardline Islamist group ousted the US-backed government last month, promising a softer brand of rule than their repressive reign in the 1990s, when women were mostly banned from education and work.

But the diktat from the education ministry was the latest move from the new government to threaten women's rights.

"All male teachers and students should attend their educational institutions," a statement said ahead of classes resuming yesterday.

The statement, issued late Friday, made no mention of women teachers or girl pupils.

Secondary schools, with students typically between the ages of 13 and 18, are often segregated by sex in Afghanistan. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they have faced repeated closures and have been shut since the Taliban seized power.

Since a US-led invasion ousted the Taliban in 2001, significant progress has been made in girls'

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	42,800,494	690,715
2 India	33,437,535	444,713
3 Brazil	21,102,536	589,744
4 UK	7,400,739	135,147
5 Russia	7,254,754	197,425
6 France	6,949,519	116,002
7 Turkey	6,820,861	61,361
8 Iran	5,408,860	116,791
9 Argentina	5,237,159	114,286
10 Colombia	4,937,596	125,826
11 Spain	4,929,546	85,783
12 Italy	4,632,275	130,284
13 Indonesia	4,188,529	140,323
14 Germany	4,141,832	93,529

Global tally
228,682,627
Deaths
4,696,882
Recovered:
205,317,580
New cases
+299,823
New deaths
+4,507

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	295,639		16,935		249,082	29,622
Saudi Arabia	546,479	+68	8,656	+5	535,450	2,373
UAE	732,299	+471	2,073	+2	723,941	6,285
Kuwait	411,124	+43	2,438	+1	407,824	862
Oman	303,309		4,092		293,618	5,599
Qatar	235,386	+82	604		233,116	1,666

Photos show North Korea expanding uranium enrichment

AP | Seoul

Recent satellite images shows North Korea is expanding a uranium enrichment plant at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex, a sign that it's intent on boosting the production of bomb materials, experts say.

The assessment comes after North Korea recently raised tensions by performing its first missile tests in six months amid long-dormant nuclear disarmament diplomacy with the United States.

"The expansion of the enrichment plant probably indicates that North Korea plans to increase its production of weapons-grade uranium at the Yongbyon site by as much as 25 percent," Jeffrey Lewis and two other experts at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey said in a report.

The report said satellite images taken by Maxar shows construction in an area adjoining the uranium enrichment plant at Yongbyon.

It said a satellite image taken on Sept. 1 shows North Korea cleared trees and prepared the ground for construction and that a construction excavator is also visible. The



A close-up of construction in progress at a processing facility at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Facility complex in Yongbyon, North Korea

report said a second image taken on Sept. 14 showed a wall erected to enclose the area, work on a foundation and panels removed from the side of the enrichment building to provide access to the newly enclosed area.

"The new area is approximately 1,000 square meters, enough space to house 1,000 additional centrifuges," the report said. "The addition of 1,000 new centrifuges would increase the plant's capacity to produce highly enriched uranium by 25 percent."

Nuclear weapons can be built using either highly enriched uranium or plutonium, and North

Korea has facilities to produce both at Yongbyon. Last month, earlier satellite photos on Yongbyon showed signs that North Korea was resuming the operation of other facilities to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

North Korea calls the Yongbyon complex "the heart" of its nuclear program. During a summit with then-President Donald Trump in early 2019, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un offered to dismantle the entire complex if he was given major sanctions relief. But the Americans rejected Kim's proposal because they viewed it as a limited denuclearization step.

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JEFFREY LEWIS, EXPERTS AT MIDDLEBURY INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Some US and South Korean experts speculate North Korea is covertly running at least one additional uranium-enrichment plant. In 2018, a top South Korean official told parliament that North Korea was estimated to have already manufactured up to 60 nuclear weapons as well.

Estimates on how many nuclear weapons North Korea can add every year vary, ranging from six to as much as 18 bombs.

In the past week, North Korea launched both ballistic and cruise missiles toward the sea in tests seen as an effort to diversify its missile forces and strengthen its attack capability on South Korea and Japan, where a total