



LONDON (The Guardian) - The Conservative MP arrested on suspicion of rape and other offences has been bailed, as Liz Truss said she was worried that there were once again "appalling" accusations against a parliamentarian. The MP was arrested on Tuesday after being accused of rape and sexual assault offences spanning seven years between 2002 and 2009. Scotland Yard said the unnamed man in his 50s was also detained on suspicion of indecent assault, abuse of position of trust and misconduct in public office. The MP has not been suspended by the Conservative party but Chris Heaton-Harris, the chief whip, asked him to stay away from parliament.

MANILA (Reuters) - Philippines president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Wednesday said his country's ties with China will expand and "shift to a higher gear" when he takes power, signalling intent to advance outgoing leader Rodrigo Duterte's pro-Beijing agenda. Marcos, who won last week's election by a landslide, said he held "very substantial" talks by phone on Wednesday with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who assured him of support for his "independent foreign policy", and agreed to hold more comprehensive discussions. The 64-year-old son and namesake of the notorious former dictator said Xi also acknowledged his late father's role in opening diplomatic relations between China and former U.S. colony the Philippines.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. firearms makers produced over 139 million guns for the commercial market over the two decades from 2000, including 11.3 million in 2020 alone, according to a new government report. Another 71 million firearms were imported in the same period -- compared to just 7.5 million exported -- underscoring how the country is literally swimming in personal weapons that have stoked a surge in gun violence, murders and suicides, according to the Justice Department report.

PARIS (AFP) - A group of Malian officers attempted a coup last week with the help of a Western state, the government in Bamako announced. While the military government did not name the alleged foreign culprit. "A small group of anti-progressive Malian officers and non-commissioned officers attempted a coup on the night of May 11-12, 2022," Government Spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga said on national TV. "These soldiers were supported by a Western state. The attempt failed thanks to the vigilance and professionalism of Mali's defense and security forces," he added. The government denounced the "outrageous attack on state security, the purpose of which is to hinder -- or even annihilate -- the substantial efforts to secure our country and return to a constitutional order that guarantees peace and stability" in Mali, but offered few details of the alleged plot.

LONDON (The Guardian) - UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has claimed the East-West relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland has been "undermined" as she confirmed plans to table legislation that would scrap parts of the agreement. The foreign secretary, who is also responsible for Brexit, set out plans for the move in a statement in the House of Commons. The bill is not expected to be published for several weeks, but if enacted could spark a trade war with the EU. Truss said the government's first priority was to uphold the Good Friday agreement, which she said was "under strain". "The Northern Ireland protocol does not have the support necessary in one part of the community in Northern Ireland," she said, referring to opposition from the Democratic Unionist party.

Hindu Groups Seek to Stop Muslims From Entering Historic Mosque

LUCKNOW, India (Reuters) - Members of hardline Hindu groups filed petitions in a court in northern India to stop Muslims from entering a historic mosque, until the court decides on an earlier plea seeking approval to look for any Hindu relics which may be on the site, lawyers said on Wednesday. Judges of a local court in Mathura, a Hindu religious town in Uttar Pradesh (UP) state, allowed the new petitions but have yet start hearings in the 2020 case aimed at securing permission to film and survey inside the 17th century Shahi Eidgah mosque. "We suspect that Hindu sym-

bols could be removed inside Shahi Eidgah mosque so we want the court to suspend entry of Muslims," said Mahendra Pratap, a lawyer involved in the case. This month, another local court in the state allowed a team to inspect and film inside one of the most prominent mosques in Varanasi, an ancient town, also the political constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On Tuesday, the country's top court overturned a ruling imposed by a Varanasi court to limit large Muslim prayer gatherings in the Gyanvapi mosque, but allowed the local court to continue proceedings.

Study: Pollution Killing 9mn People a Year, Africa Hardest Hit



People enjoy a day out at Primrose Hill as a high air pollution warning was issued for London on March 24, 2022.

LONDON (REUTERS) - Worsening outdoor air pollution and toxic lead poisoning have kept global deaths from environmental contamination at an estimated 9 million per year since 2015 - countering modest progress made in tackling pollution elsewhere, a team of scientists reported.

Air pollution from industry processes along with urbanization drove a 7 percent increase in pollution-related deaths from 2015 to 2019, according to the scientists' analysis of data on global mortality and pollution levels.

"We're sitting in the stew pot and slowly burning," said Richard Fuller, a study co-author and head of the global nonprofit Pure Earth. But unlike climate change, malaria, or HIV, "we haven't given (environmental pollution) much focus."

An earlier version of the work published in 2017 also estimated the death toll from pollution at roughly 9 million per year - or about one of every six deaths worldwide - and the cost to the global economy at up to \$4.6 trillion per year. That puts pollution on par with smoking in terms of global deaths. COVID-19, by comparison, has killed about 6.7 million people globally since the

pandemic began. For their most recent study, published in the online journal Lancet Planetary Health, the authors analyzed 2019 data from the Global Burden of Disease, an ongoing study by the University of Washington that assesses overall pollution exposure and calculates mortality risk.

The new analysis looks more specifically at the causes of pollution - separating traditional contaminants such as indoor smoke or sewage from more modern pollutants, like industrial air pollution and toxic chemicals. Here are some of the key takeaways:

Deaths from traditional pollutants are declining globally. But they remain a major problem in Africa and some other developing countries. Tainted water and soil and dirty indoor air put Chad, the Central African Republic and Niger as the three countries with the most pollution-related deaths, according to data adjusted for population.

Deaths caused by exposure to modern pollutants such as heavy metals, agrochemicals and fossil fuel emissions are "just skyrocketing", rising 66% since 2000, said co-author Rachael Kupka, executive director of the New York-based Global Alliance on Health and Pollution.

Beijing Warns Japan-U.S. Ties Should Not Harm China



A virtual meeting between Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (L) and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, May 18, 2022.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Wednesday, said that bilateral cooperation between Japan and the U.S. should not provoke confrontation between camps, and even less undermine China's sovereignty, security and development interests.

made the remarks during a virtual meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi when commenting on next week's Tokyo summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an informal security grouping

of the U.S., Japan, Australia and India. "What is concerning and alarming is that even before the U.S. leader has arrived, talk of the so-called Japan-U.S. joint confrontation with China has already been widely heard," he said. Noting that Japan and the United States are allies, while China and Japan have a treaty of peace and friendship, he warned that Japan should draw lessons from history. Japan should do good for regional peace and stability, act with caution and refrain from pursuing a beggarly-neighbor path, he stressed.

The Chinese foreign minister also touched on developing relations with Japan.

Noting that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan, he called for efforts to take the opportunity to consolidate the political foundation of bilateral relations.

It is important to abide by the principles and spirit of the four China-Japan political documents, and implement such important common understandings as the two countries should "be partners, not threats," he said.

The two sides should tap the potential of cooperation and strengthen coordination and cooperation in digital economy, green, low-carbon and climate change governance, he added.

For his part, Hayashi said that Japan and China share broad common interests and enjoy huge potential and broad prospects for cooperation.

Japan is ready to work with China to remain true to the original aspiration of normalizing diplomatic ties, maintain candid communication, reduce misunderstanding and misjudgment, properly handle sensitive issues and enhance political mutual trust, he added.

The two sides also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concern and agreed to maintain communication

North Korean Leader Slams Officials' 'Immaturity' in Response to COVID Outbreak



North Korea's Premier Kim Tok Hun, inspects a pharmacy amid the coronavirus disease pandemic in Pyongyang May 17, 2022.

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un slammed his country's response to its first confirmed COVID-19 outbreak as immature, accusing government officials of inadequacies and inertia as fever cases swept the country, state media reported on Wednesday.

North Korea reported 232,880 more people with fever symp-

toms, and six more deaths after country revealed the COVID outbreak last week. It did not say how many people had tested positive for COVID-19.

Presiding over a politburo meeting of the ruling Workers' Party on Tuesday, Kim said the "immaturity in the state capacity for coping with the crisis" increased the "complexity and hardships" in fighting the

pandemic, according to KCNA.

Since its first acknowledgement of the COVID-19 outbreak, the North has reported 1.72 million patients with fever symptoms, including 62 deaths as of Tuesday evening.

Yet the North also said the country's virus situation was taking a "favorable turn," adding the party meeting discussed "maintaining the good chance in the overall epidemic prevention front."

According to KCNA, North Korea has been pushing to better handle "the collection, transport and test of specimen from those persons with fever, while installing additional quarantine facilities."

KCNA also said health officials have developed a COVID-19 treatment guide aimed at preventing drug overdoses and other problems.

Officials and researchers have stepped up efforts to "massively develop and produce drugs effective in the treatment of the malignant virus infection and establish more rational diagnosis and treatment methods," but KCNA did not give details on which drugs were involved.

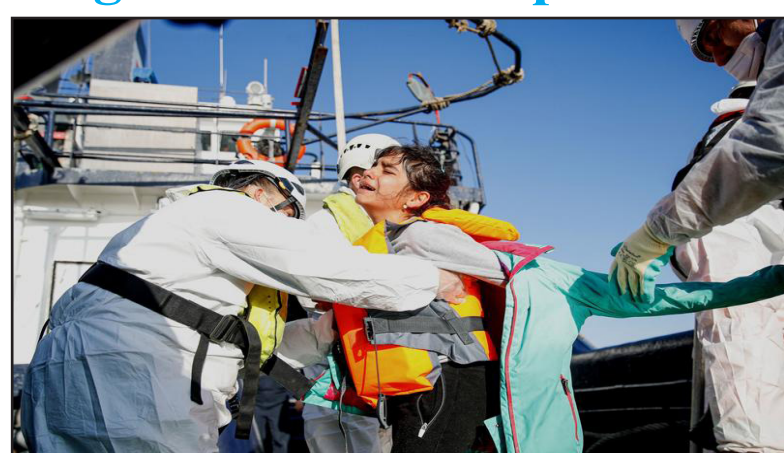
Treatment of Refugees Shows European Bias

UNITED NATIONS (Xinhua) - The ready acceptance of Ukrainians fleeing conflict has put a spotlight on Europe's "double standards" for migrants, standing against its unwelcoming attitude toward people uprooted by violence in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, the head of the world's largest humanitarian network Francesco Rocca has said.

Francesco Rocca, president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said he doesn't think "there is any difference" between someone fleeing eastern Ukraine's Donbass region and someone escaping the Boko Haram group in Nigeria.

"Those who are fleeing violence, those who are seeking protection, should be treated equally," said Rocca, whose organization operates in more than 192 countries, with almost 15 million volunteers.

Speaking at a news conference, he said there was "a moral imperative" to help people escape violence and upheaval, and "the political, public



A girl cries as migrants are rescued by crew members of the Abeille Languedoc ship after its generator broke down in the waters. They were trying to cross the English Channel illegally to Britain, off the coast of northern France on May 9.

and humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis has shown what is possible when humanity and dignity come first, when there is global solidarity".

He said the 27-member European Union still has different approaches to migration at its eastern border from Ukraine and its southern border on the Mediterranean sea.

By contrast, Rocca said, migrants,

refugees and asylum-seekers trying to get to Europe are still dying, facing abuse and struggling to access essential services.

Over 48,000 migrants have died or disappeared since 2014 while traveling at sea, and the deadliest route is that taken by migrants across the central Mediterranean to Europe, with at least 19,000 such deaths, he said.