

British PM Faces New Accusations of Lying



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was pictured raising a glass at a leaving party for his communications chief.

LONDON (AFP) -- UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday faced renewed accusations of lying, after photos emerged of him drinking in a Downing Street party during lockdown in 2020.

The revelations came as a senior civil servant was expected to publish her long-awaited full report into the "Partygate" scandal, despite claims that Johnson was trying to have it dropped.

A slew of revelations earlier this year about lockdown-breaking parties caused widespread political and public anger, and put Johnson's position in jeopardy.

But the heat was taken out of a potential mutiny from his own MPs by

the war in Ukraine, and his hawkish support for President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The photos published late Monday by ITV News were taken during a leaving party for Johnson's communications chief Lee Cain on November 13, 2020, days after the government ordered a second lockdown, and banned household mixing.

Johnson can be seen raising a glass and chatting with several people around a table with bottles of wine and food.

Police have investigated the event as part of their probe into "Partygate" and fined one person, but not Johnson.

When he was asked in parliament last December about the gathering,

he insisted there was no party on that date and that no rules were broken.

Johnson has been fined over a surprise birthday party he attended at Downing Street in June 2020, but was not fined for any other event.

The deputy leader of the main opposition Labour party, Angela Rayner, said it was "astonishing" that Johnson was not fined for the November gathering.

She told ITV News that it looked "pretty clear" there was a party that was not a work event, calling it "pretty shocking" he had not been fined for it.

"He knew that he broke the rules, and he's known it all along and yet he's tried to get away with it," she added. "He's tried to lie to the British public, and he's tried to lie to parliament," Rayner said.

The Times newspaper reported on Tuesday that Johnson had put pressure on civil servant Sue Gray to drop her much-anticipated report.

Sky News quoted sources as saying Johnson had questioned what more would be left to say after the police concluded their work.

Rayner joined a chorus of opposition voices calling for the Gray report to be published "as soon as possible".

"The full report -- and all the evidence -- must be published without delay," she tweeted.

"Anything less will amount to a further cover up from this deceitful, untrustworthy PM."

Dozens of Rohingya Dead or Missing After Boat Sinks



Rohingya refugees cross into the mainland after arriving in Bangladesh on Sept. 10, 2017 in Shah Porir Dwip Bangladesh.

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) -- Dozens of ethnic Rohingya refugees were dead or missing after a boat with about 90 people aboard, including children, capsized and sank in bad weather off the coast of Myanmar over the weekend, according to media reports.

More than 20 survivors were detained by authorities in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady region, the U.S.-funded Radio Free Asia reported, citing residents in the coastal district of Shwe Taung Yan.

According to survivors, the boat, which was bound for Malaysia,

ran into trouble within a couple of days after setting out from Sittwe in Myanmar's Rakhine State on May 19, the Ayeyarwaddy Times reported. So far, at least 14 bodies had been recovered, but more than 50 people were still missing, Radio Free Asia said.

There are only around 600,000 Rohingya Muslims left in Myanmar, a predominantly Buddhist country with a long history of military rule. Rohingya have been rendered as stateless by Myanmar, and as a result of past ethnic violence and persecution the United Nations High Com-

missioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 148,000 of them are displaced, with many living in camps.

A spokesman for the military government did not respond to a request for comment on the latest reported tragedy involving Rohingya perishing at sea in a bid to escape persecution in Myanmar.

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in 2017 to escape a military-led crackdown that UN investigators have said was carried out with "genocidal intent" and included mass killings and rapes.

Myanmar has denied widespread atrocities, framing the violence as a response to attacks by Rohingya militants.

The other main destination for Rohingya refugees has been Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country that is seen as sympathetic though they are not officially recognized there as refugees.

Some 630 Rohingya had attempted sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal between January to May this year, UNHCR said, noting women and children made up 60% of the maritime crossings.

"The latest tragedy shows once again the sense of desperation being felt by Rohingya in Myanmar and in the region," Indrika Ratwatte, UNHCR's Director for Asia and the Pacific, said in a statement.

Environmentalists Meet to Address Plastic Waste Disaster

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Environmental activists are meeting in South Africa this week to press governments and businesses to reduce the production of plastic because it is harming the continent's environment.

The conference, "Towards Zero Plastics to the Seas of Africa," being held in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), South Africa, through Friday brings together academics and experts on the plastics industry and its effects on the continent, say organizers.

The participants are focusing on the actions needed to stop plastics from ruining Africa's land and seas, say the organizers, the African Marine Waste Network. The conference follows the United Nations Environmental Assembly's resolution for the development of a legally binding treaty on plastic waste by 2024.

Despite a growing recycling industry, plastic waste is piling up in Africa's landfill sites, clogging stormwater drainage systems and polluting rivers and oceans.

Africa has an average waste collection rate of 55% but only 4% of it is recycled, according to a report by the UN and the Center for Scientific and Industrial Research in South Africa.

This is way below the African Union's target for the continent's cities to recycle at least 50% of their waste by next

year.

In Johannesburg — South Africa's most populous city with more than 6 million people — the landfill sites are fast reaching capacity. The municipality collects up to 40,000 tons of general waste including plastic every month, according to its waste management agency Pikitup.

The city's four landfill sites will be full in three years, forcing them to find more landfill sites, officials say.

"Plastic is not biodegradable ... so it lives for a very long time. It eats up our landfill space and is very difficult to compact," said Pikitup spokesman Muzi Mkhwanazi.

In 2018 the city made it mandatory for residents to separate plastic from other waste, but not many are practicing that.

Johannesburg's biggest landfill site in Turffontein is a hive of activity as waste trucks drop off garbage and waste pickers spread themselves across the area to pluck out plastics, cardboard, bottles and wood that can be sold to recyclers. The rest is crushed and then covered by new deliveries of waste.

Thousands of freelance waste pickers work on the streets of the sprawling metropolis as well as at the landfill site. They sort various types of garbage into what they can sell to recyclers in order to eke out a living. Others have paid employment at recycling centers.

China Warns U.S. 'Playing With Fire' on Taiwan



Military officers on armored vehicles salute the Taiwanese president during a parade for the Double-Tenth National Day Celebration Ceremony.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China has warned that the United States is "playing with fire" after President Joe Biden said that Washington would respond militarily if Beijing used force to reclaim Taiwan.

The Chinese State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office said that the U.S. is "using the 'Taiwan card' to contain China, and will itself get burned".

State outlet Xinhua cited the office's spokesperson Zhu Fenglian as saying that he urges the U.S. to "stop any remarks or actions that violate" previously established principles between Beijing and Washington.

Speaking from Tokyo during a trip to Asia, Biden had answered with an unambiguous "yes" when asked by reporters whether the U.S. would "get involved militarily" in Taiwan if China takes action to annex it.

Pressed further about the apparent shift in U.S. policy, Biden said: "That's the commitment we made."

"Look, here's the situation: We agree with the 'One China' policy; we've signed on to it and all the attendant agreements made from there," the U.S. president added. "But the idea that it can be just taken by force is just not appropriate."

During a town hall hosted by CNN last

October, the U.S. president also said Washington would come to Taiwan's defense if China tried to capture the island.

Beijing still claims Taiwan, whose formal name is the Republic of China, as a province and has not ruled out unifying the two sides by force.

Washington has warm ties with Taiwan, but it officially pursues a "One China" policy, which states there is a single China but does not define it.

Despite not having official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the U.S. describes the island as a "partner". It also sells weapons to Taiwan and has strong trade relations with the island.

The relationship between Washington and Beijing has been stormy in the past few years as the U.S. has prioritized strategic competition with China in its foreign policy under former President Donald Trump, a position fully embraced by Biden.

On Monday, Pentagon officials in Washington were quick to stress that Biden's comments do not signal a change in the U.S. position.

"As the president said, our 'One China' policy has not changed. He reiterated that policy and our commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin told reporters.

Pakistan Bans Ousted PM Khan From Holding Rally



People cross a bridge on Ravi River which is closed for traffic due to shipping containers placed by authorities in an attempt to foil a planned protest, in Lahore, Pakistan, May 24, 2022.

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan on Tuesday banned ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan from holding a massive, planned rally in the capital of Islamabad and cracked down on his supporters in overnight raids across the country, arresting hundreds.

The ban came hours after a policeman was killed during one of the raids, when a supporter of the former premier opened fire after officers entered his home in the city of Lahore.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah warned Khan that he would "not be allowed to disrupt peace in Islamabad" and would be arrested if needed, should the rally go ahead. Sanaullah earlier in the day accused Khan of seeking to create a civil war-like situation.

The former cricket star turned politician, Khan served as prime minister for over three and half years until he was ousted by a no-confidence vote in parliament in April.

Khan has remained defiant, demanding early elections and claiming his removal was the result of a U.S.-organized plot in collusion with his successor, Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

Earlier this week, Khan urged supporters to converge on Islamabad on Wednesday for a massive rally to pressure Sharif's government. The demonstration, he said, would continue until a date for snap elections was announced.

Sanaullah, the interior minister, said the decision to ban the rally was taken after Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party failed to assure the administration in writing that the rally would be peaceful.

Earlier Tuesday, authorities stepped up security in Islamabad, deploying additional officers and paramilitary Rangers. Large shipping containers were placed on a key road leading to the parliament building, to prevent Khan's supporters from getting close and possibly staging a sit-in there.

According to Fawad Chaudhry, a spokesman for the Tehreek-e-Insaf party, police raids against their supporters started shortly after midnight Monday. Homes were still being raided on Tuesday morning and at least 400 supporters of the party were arrested across the country, Chaudhry said. Khan condemned the arrests on Twitter.

Authorities confirmed the raids but refused to share details about any arrests.

At a news conference in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Tuesday, Khan vowed to carry on with the rally in the Pakistani capital as planned.

"I tell my supporters to reach Islamabad and I will also be there," he said, insisting he was not afraid of death and urging his followers to "get ready for sacrifices" for the sake of Pakistan's sovereignty.

Several other prominent figures from Khan's party warned police they could face violent resistance if raids on their homes continued.

News in Brief

AVOS, Switzerland (Reuters) -- Multiple threats to the global economy topped the worries of the world's well-heeled at the annual Davos think-fest, with some flagging the risk of a worldwide recession. Political and business leaders gathering for the World Economic Forum (WEF) meet against a backdrop of inflation at its highest level in a generation in major economies including the United States, Britain and Europe. These price rises have undermined consumer confidence and shaken the world's financial markets, prompting central banks including the U.S. Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. Meanwhile, the repercussions on oil and food markets of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February - which Moscow describes as a "special military operation" - and COVID-19 lockdowns in China with no clear end have compounded the gloom.

BEIJING (AFP) -- Chinese premier Li Keqiang has sent a congratulatory note to newly elected Australian leader Anthony Albanese, easing a years-long freeze in high-level contacts between the two countries. Relations between China and Australia have been shattered by a string of rows over human rights, espionage and the origins of Covid-19. But Li's letter signaled a willingness to improve relations after Albanese's election, in what is the most significant high-level contact between Beijing and Canberra in at least two years. "The Chinese side is ready to work with the Australian side to review the past, look into the future... to promote the sound and steady growth of their comprehensive strategic partnership," Li said, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency late Monday. Albanese said the letter was "welcome" and said he would "respond appropriately" when he returns from a summit of Quad leaders in Tokyo.

SYDNEY (ABC News) -- The captain of a cargo ship has been charged over his role in the attempted smuggling of 320 kilograms of cocaine onto Western Australia's shores. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) allege the 51-year-old man from Montenegro carried cocaine, worth about \$128 million, on a bulk shipping carrier called Interlink Veracity that he was in charge of. It's claimed the man loaded the drugs onto the cargo vessel at an overseas port, then travelled into Australian waters. On May 14 the drugs, wrapped in plastic packaging, were dumped into the ocean about 28 kilometers off Port Hedland in WA's north-west, police said. The packages were then retrieved by two men who had sailed out on a small boat.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- Flash floods in India's northeastern state of Assam have killed at least 25 people and displaced over 650,000 from their homes in the past 10 days, officials said on Tuesday. Heavy monsoons are a yearly occurrence in Assam, resulting in flooding and landslides that force residents to flee their homes, often leaving behind their homes and belongings. The Brahmaputra River, one of the largest rivers in the world which flows from Tibet to India and finally into Bangladesh, burst its banks in Assam, inundating more than 1,800 villages in 26 districts this month. Parts of the railway network were devastated. Authorities have also set up 366 relief camps across 20 districts, providing temporary shelter for more than 95,000 people. Roads, homes, and buildings have been inundated by floodwaters in parts of the state.

BEIJING (AP) — China on Tuesday said the U.S., Britain and other foreign powers are seeking to sabotage its foreign relations by orchestrating criticism surrounding a trip by the top United Nations official for human rights. China has long held back the fact-finding mission led by Michelle Bachelet, focused on allegations of mass confinement, forced labor and compulsory birth control measures imposed on members of the Uyghur, Kazakh and other Muslim minorities. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin went on the offensive over such criticisms Tuesday, saying "the U.S., Britain and other Western countries have been repeatedly staging political forces around the UN high commissioner for human rights' visit to China." "They have first openly pressured and strongly demanded that the high commissioner visit China and Xinjiang, and conducted the so-called investigation with presumption of guilt," Wang said at a daily briefing.

BRASILIA (AFP) -- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Monday dismissed the president of state oil giant Petrobras, who had been in the job for only 40 days. Fuel prices in Brazil have increased more than 33 percent in the past year, according to official figures, driving annual inflation of more than 12 percent and hurting Brazilians' wallets. Inflation is a central issue as the far-right Bolsonaro seeks re-election in October and trails leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in the polls. Without giving specific reasons for the dismissal, the Ministry of Mines and Energy in a statement thanked Jose Mauro Coelho for his service but said: "Brazil is currently experiencing a challenging moment, due to the effects of the extreme volatility of hydrocarbons in international markets." Coelho was appointed in April to finish the term of his predecessor, Joaquim Silva e Luna, and became the third Petrobras president to be dumped by Bolsonaro with fuel prices soaring.