



CANBERRA (AFP) -- China hailed mended ties with Australia on Monday, saying relations were "on the right track" as the trading partners moved on from a bitter economic dispute despite a duel for influence in the Pacific. Chinese Premier Li Qiang arrived to a grand ceremonial welcome at Parliament House in Canberra, before talks with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The highest-ranking Chinese official to visit since 2017, Li said his trip to Australia demonstrated "that this relationship is on the right track of steady improvement and development". Li offered an olive branch, granting Australian citizens limited visa-free access to China, a gesture limited to a relatively small number of nations in Beijing's good books. Australia, meanwhile, said the two countries had agreed to improve "military-to-military" communication, lowering the temperature after recent brushes in international waters.

HANOI (Reuters) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Hanoi this week, multiple officials said, highlighting Communist-ruled Vietnam's loyalty to Russia and triggering a U.S. rebuke. The visit follows Hanoi avoiding a Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland last weekend, while sending its deputy foreign minister to a BRICS meeting in Russia earlier last week. Putin, who was sworn in for a fifth time just over a month ago, is expected to meet Vietnam's new president, To Lam, and other leaders during the two-day visit to Hanoi on Wednesday and Thursday, officials said. The United States, which upgraded relations with Hanoi last year and is Vietnam's top trading partner, reacted harshly. "No country should give Putin a platform to promote his war of aggression and otherwise allow him to normalize his atrocities," a spokesperson for the U.S. embassy in Hanoi told Reuters when asked about the impact of the visit on ties with the United States.

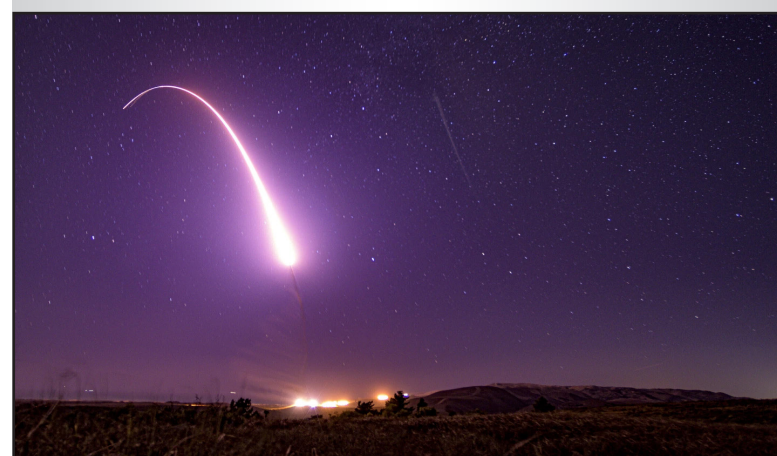
WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- An Indian man suspected by the U.S. of involvement in an unsuccessful plot to kill a Sikh separatist on American soil has been extradited to the United States from the Czech Republic, according to the federal Bureau of Prisons website and a source familiar with the matter. Nikhil Gupta has been accused by U.S. federal prosecutors of plotting with an Indian government official to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a U.S. resident who advocated for a sovereign Sikh state in northern India. Gupta traveled to Prague from India last June and was arrested by Czech authorities. Last month, a Czech court rejected his petition to avoid being sent to the U.S., clearing the way for the Czech justice minister to extradite him. The discovery of assassination plots against Sikh separatists in the U.S. and Canada has tested relations with India, seen by Western nations as a counter to China's rising global influence. India's government denies involvement in the plots. Canada said in September its intelligence agencies were pursuing allegations linking India's government to the murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023 in Canada.

KYIV, Ukraine (AFP) -- A senior Ukrainian energy official has warned that scheduled power outages and emergency blackouts will intensify over the coming weeks, after a string of Russian attacks crippled Ukrainian electricity generation. President Volodymyr Zelensky said this month the aerial bombardments have halved the country's electricity production compared to a year ago, disrupting and limiting supplies for millions. "Over the next few weeks, the situation will be much tougher than it is today," the head of national grid operator Ukrenego, Volodymyr Kydrytsky said in an interview late on Sunday. He said periods during which Ukrainians might not have power were likely to be extended by up to 12 hours per day and that outages could become more "stringent". "This situation will continue until the end of July," he said in the interview, broadcast on state media.

KOLKATA (AFP) -- At least seven people were killed when an express passenger train and a goods train collided Monday in India's West Bengal state, derailed three passenger carriages, police said. Images on Indian broadcasters showed the tangled wreckage of carriages flipped on their side, and one thrust high into the air precariously balanced on another. Police said rescuers were scouring the twisted carriages in case there were more bodies trapped beneath. The incident is the latest to hit India's creaking rail network, which carries millions of passengers each day. India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar state, killing an estimated 800 people. In June last year, a three-train collision killed nearly 300 people in Odisha state.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- An armed man shot and injured nine people, including two children, at a water-park near Detroit before shooting himself after being cornered by police, authorities said. Authorities called the incident random gunfire and said they cornered the suspect in a house nearby, where he died after shooting himself. The local sheriff showed an image of a semiautomatic rifle from inside the house to which the unnamed suspect was tracked. A handgun was recovered from the scene of the shooting, officials added. The suspect was described as a 42-year-old man, while the motives for the shooting were not clear. An 8-year-old boy was in critical condition after being shot in the head while his 4-year-old brother was also wounded but stable. Their mother was in critical condition, too, after being hurt in the abdomen and leg, Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard told reporters.

NATO in Talks to Put Nuclear Weapons on Standby



This image taken with a slow shutter speed on Oct. 2, 2019 shows an unarmed Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile test launch at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.

LONDON (Reuters) -- NATO is in talks to deploy more nuclear weapons, taking them out of storage and placing them on standby, in the face of a perceived growing threat from Russia and China, the head of the alliance said on Monday. Jens Stoltenberg told Britain's Telegraph newspaper that there were live consultations between members to use transparency around its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent. "I won't go into operational details about how many nuclear warheads should be operational and which should be stored, but we need to consult on these issues. That's exactly what we're doing," he told the paper. "Transparency helps to communicate the direct message that we, of course, are a nuclear alliance." "NATO's aim is, of course, a world without nuclear weapons, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will remain a nuclear alliance, because a

world where Russia, China and North Korea have nuclear weapons, and NATO does not, is a more dangerous world." Stoltenberg said last week that nuclear weapons were NATO's "ultimate security guarantee" and a means to preserve peace. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly warned that Moscow could use nuclear weapons to defend itself in extreme circumstances. It accuses the U.S. and its European allies of pushing the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation by bringing Ukraine billions of dollars worth of weapons, some of which are being used against Russian territory. NATO, which has taken on a greater role in coordinating arms supplies to Kyiv, rarely talks about weapons publicly, although it is known that the U.S. has deployed nuclear bombs to several locations in Europe.

Tens of Thousands of Rohingya Trapped in Myanmar Fighting



A Rohingyas man wails after a group of the Muslim minority in Myanmar flees an army offensive.

MAUNGDAW (Reuters) -- Tens of thousands of Muslim minority Rohingya are feared to be caught in fighting in western Myanmar, as a powerful armed ethnic group bears down on junta positions in a coastal town on the country's border with Bangladesh. The Arakan Army (AA), which is fighting for autonomy for Myanmar's Rakhine region, said late on Sunday that residents of Maungdaw town, inhabited primarily by the Rohingya, should leave by 9 p.m. ahead of a planned offensive on the settlement. The AA's attack on Maungdaw is the latest in a months-long rebel onslaught against the Myanmar junta, which took power in a February 2021 coup, and now finds itself in an increasingly weakened position across large parts of the country. "We are going to attack the remaining posts" of junta, the AA said in a statement, asking residents to stay clear of military positions in Maungdaw for their own safety. A junta spokesman did not respond to a call seeking comment.

Around 70,000 Rohingya who are currently in Maungdaw are trapped as the fighting draws closer, said Aung Kyaw Moe, the deputy human rights minister in Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government. "They have nowhere to run to," he told Reuters. Thousands of Rohingya fled toward neighboring Bangladesh last month, seeking safety from the escalating conflict, although the neighboring country is reluctant to accept more refugees. Their movement was triggered by battles in and around the town of Buthidaung, around 25 km (15 miles) away to the east of Maungdaw, that was captured by the AA after intense fighting during which the rebel group was accused of targeting the Rohingya community. The AA denies the allegations. Rohingya have faced persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar for decades. Nearly a million of them live in refugee camps in Bangladesh's border district of Cox's Bazar after fleeing a military-led crackdown in Rakhine in 2017.

China Blasts G7's 'Arrogance, Prejudice and Lies'



G7 leaders applaud an Italian Army parachuter during their summit at Borgo Egnazia, Italy, on June 13, 2024.

BEIJING (AFP/Reuters) -- China hit back on Monday after G7 leaders warned Beijing to stop sending weapons components to Russia, saying their end-of-summit statement was "full of arrogance, prejudice and lies". When Group of Seven leaders met last week in Italy, souring trade relations with China as well as tensions over Ukraine and the South China Sea were a focus of their discussions. The statement released at the end of the summit on Friday criticized China on many of these issues. It included an accusation against Beijing of sending dual-use materials to Russia, which it said were helping the war effort in Ukraine. On Monday China's foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said the statement had "slandered and at-

tacked China". It had "rehashed cliches that have no factual basis, no legal basis, and no moral justification, and are full of arrogance, prejudice and lies", he said at a regular press briefing. The Group of Seven -- made up of the United States, Japan, France, Germany, Canada, Britain and Italy -- had also taken aim at what it called "dangerous" incursions by China in the South China Sea. Worries of a military escalation between China and its neighbors are rising, and on Monday Philippine and Chinese vessels collided near the Second Thomas Shoal, according to the Chinese Coast Guard. "We oppose China's militarization, and coercive and intimidation activities in the South China Sea," read the G7 statement, using stronger language than at last year's summit

in Japan. Coming the same week the European Union warned it was planning to impose new tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, the G7 statement also referenced what it called "harmful overcapacity". The EU, which attends G7 summits as an unofficial eighth partner, and others argue that generous subsidies by China, particularly in green energy sectors, risk flooding the global market with cheap goods. China has repeatedly dismissed the concerns. On Monday, Lin said that G7 "speculation" on overcapacity "completely deviates from the objective facts and economic laws, creates excuses for protectionism, and also undermines the efforts of global green and low-carbon transition and climate change cooperation". The G7 "does not represent the international community", he said, accusing it of being "a political tool for safeguarding the hegemony of the United States and the West". China also said it had launched an anti-dumping investigation into pork imports from the European Union, the latest step in a mounting trade standoff between the bloc and its largest economic partner. Imports of pork and pork by-products from EU nations totaled over three billion dollars last year, Beijing's customs data showed. Monday's probe is in response to an application submitted by a local trade grouping on behalf of domestic producers, Beijing said.

Report: World Worried About AI-Powered Newsrooms



A general view of the newsroom of the Washington Post, in Washington, DC, January 28, 2016.

LONDON (Reuters) -- Global concerns about the use of AI in news production and misinformation are growing, a report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found, posing fresh challenges to newsrooms already struggling to engage audiences. The institute's annual Digital News Report published on Monday, which this year is based on surveys of nearly 100,000 people across 47 countries, offers a picture of the hurdles news media faces in lifting revenue and sustaining business. Newsrooms globally are working to address a new challenge with

generative artificial intelligence, as tech giants and startups like Google and OpenAI build tools that can offer summaries of information and siphon traffic from news websites. But the report found that consumers are suspicious about the use of AI to create news content, particularly for sensitive subjects such as politics. According to the survey, 52% of U.S. respondents and 63% of UK respondents said they would be uncomfortable with news produced mostly with AI. The report surveyed 2,000 people in each country, noting that respondents were more comfortable with behind-the-scenes uses of AI to

make journalists' work more efficient. "It was surprising to see the level of suspicion," said Nic Newman, senior research associate at the Reuters Institute and lead author of the Digital News Report. "People broadly had fears about what might happen to content reliability and trust." Concerns about false news content online rose by three percentage points from last year, with 59% of survey respondents saying they were worried. This figure was higher in South Africa and the U.S. at 81% and 72%, respectively, as both countries hold elections this year, the report said. Another challenge facing news organizations is the general unwillingness of audiences to pay for news subscriptions. Following some growth during the pandemic, 17% of respondents across 20 countries said they paid for online news, a figure that has been unchanged for the past three years, the report said. A significant proportion of news subscribers in the U.S. were also likely to be paying discounted rates due to trials or promotions, with 46% paying less than the full price for their subscriptions. News influencers are playing a bigger role than mainstream media organizations in delivering the news to users of popular online platforms like TikTok.

Officials Stranded After New Zealand PM's Plane Fails Again

WELLINGTON (AAP) -- Air New Zealand has swooped in to save prime minister Christopher Luxon's trade mission to Japan, after another one of the country's beleaguered defense force planes was grounded in Papua New Guinea over maintenance issues. Luxon's high-powered business delegation was travelling to Tokyo on Sunday via Papua New Guinea, as part of the government's mission to grow trade. However, the group -- including trade minister Todd McClay, as well as dozens of business leaders and journalists -- was left stranded after the discovery of blown fuses on the NZDF Boeing 757. Luxon was able to escape the drama and maintain his schedule, by taking a last-minute commercial flight to Tokyo via Hong Kong along with three staff, but 50 others were forced into an unscheduled overnight stay in Port Moresby.

The breakdown was the second in three months, with Luxon making a similar last-minute switch to commercial flights in March to attend an Asean summit in Melbourne. Defense minister Judith Collins explained the plane was unable to make it to Japan, but could manage a three-hour flight to Brisbane, while a re-routed Air New Zealand flight was sent to pick up the delegation. Air New Zealand's chief executive Greg Foran -- who was among those stuck in Papua New Guinea -- ordered NZ99, a direct service from Auckland to Tokyo, to make the stopover in Port Moresby to pick up the stranded delegation. The group would reach Tokyo on Monday night. In an interview with New Zealand media, Collins agreed the incident was "embarrassing". It could also prove to be expensive, with the gov-

ernment picking up the bill for the repairs, the stopover and most likely the additional flight. Foran told media the bill was a matter for another day, adding "let's get everyone there. We'll worry about what we're going to do financially when we get everyone there." In recent years, NZDF planes have also failed former prime ministers Jacinda Ardern on visits to Washington and Melbourne, and delayed John Key's 80-strong delegation to India, with a similar issue discovered on a stopover in Louisville. There are strong debates in New Zealand as to whether it can afford to replace the planes, which are primarily used for defense business, and are seconded for use by the prime minister on trade missions. They are due to be replaced in 2028, though a defense capability review -- due this month -- may recommend bringing that timeframe forward.