

News in brief

Indonesia replaces tech minister held in corruption probe

◆ Indonesian President Joko Widodo named



a new communications minister in a cabinet shake-up yesterday after the previous minister was detained in a corruption probe linked to a project that cost the country half a billion dollars in losses. Budi Arie Setiadi succeeds Johnny G Plate, who was arrested in May over accusations he demanded kickbacks related

to a government telecommunications project to expand internet access. Plate, who denies the allegations, is the fifth member of Widodo's two administrations to be arrested in a graft scandal since 2014.

◆ Solomon Islands' leader Manasseh Sogavare yesterday attacked foreign

Solomons PM attacks 'unneighbourly' China questions

questions about a new police deal with China as "unneighbourly" interference. During a July 9-15 visit to China, the prime minister signed a raft of deals including an agreement allowing Beijing to maintain a police presence in the Pacific island country until 2025. The United States, Australia and New Zealand have expressed unease about the policing "implementation plan", urging Beijing to soothe concerns by releasing more details. "Australia and United States should not fear China's police support to Royal Solomons Police Force," Sogavare told reporters after his arrival back in Honiara.



New Zealand calls on China to curb tensions in 'contested' Pacific

◆ New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins urged China yesterday to



help curb tensions in a "more contested, less predictable" Pacific, and to preserve access to critical trade routes. China is rapidly expanding its diplomatic, economic and military footprint in the Pacific, often jostling for influence with the United States and its allies. Nearly half of New Zealand's trade passes through the South China Sea, said Hipkins, who led a trade delegation to Beijing last month and met with President Xi Jinping.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Virgin Galactic's next spaceflight will include sweepstakes winners



A video grab shows Galactic 01 mission spacecraft launching the first commercial flight from Spaceport City in New Mexico  
AFP | Washington

Virgin Galactic's next spaceflight will include a mother-daughter duo from the Caribbean who won their tickets in a sweepstakes contest, as well as an 80-year-old former Olympian.

The company founded by British billionaire Richard Branson flew its first paying customers, members of the Italian Air Force, last month -- a long awaited achievement that put it back on track in the emerging private spaceflight sector.

Its next mission "Galactic 02," is planned for August 10 from Spaceport America, New Mexico, the company said in a statement.

On board will be Keisha Schahaff, a health coach from Antigua and Barbuda, who won a contest that raised \$1.7 million for the non-profit Space for Humanity, which aims to widen space access.

"I always was interested in space as a little girl," she told AFP in an interview in 2021. "This is a great opportunity for me to feel alive and to just make the greatest adventure ever."

She will be joined by her



Virgin Galactic's spaceflights involve a giant, twin-fuselage carrier aircraft that takes off from a runway, gains altitude, then drops a rocket-powered spaceplane that soars into space with the ticket-holders

daughter Anastasia Mayers, an 18-year-old student at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, who is studying philosophy and physics. They will be the first mother-daughter duo to fly to space.

Also on board will be Jon Goodwin, an 80-year-old adventurer who competed in the 1972 Olympic games as a canoeist for Britain. Goodwin was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2014 and will be the second person with the condition to travel to space.

Russia says Ukraine grain

Kremlin says its conditions for extending grain deal

● Russia pulls out of Black Sea grain deal after two killed in Crimean bridge explosion

AFP | Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday said it was exiting a major agreement to facilitate Ukraine grain exports hours after drones struck Russia's only bridge connecting its mainland to the annexed Crimea peninsula.

Moscow, which has for months complained about the implementation of the grain pact, said the attack on the Kerch bridge had nothing to do with its withdrawal from the deal designed to avoid food shortages in vulnerable countries.

"The grain deal has ceased. As soon as the Russian part (of the agreements) are fulfilled, the Russian side will immediately return to the grain deal," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

But President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine was prepared to keep ex-



A video grab shows the damaged Kerch bridge -- linking Crimea to Russia

porting grain via the Black Sea despite Russia's exit from the deal.

"Even without the Russian Federation, everything must be done so that we can use this Black Sea corridor," Zelensky said.

"We are not afraid. We have been approached by companies that own ships. They said that they are ready" to continue shipments, he said.

Moscow's announcement came

hours after drones hit the sole road link connecting Russia to the annexed Crimea peninsula, a key supply line for Russian forces in the south of Ukraine. Kyiv's navy and SBU security service carried out the "special operation" using seaborne drones, a security service source said.

Russian authorities said a civilian couple was killed and their daughter wounded in the attack on the bridge,

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Thousands evacuated as typhoon nears southern China, Vietnam

AFP | Hong Kong

Tens of thousands of people were being evacuated in southern China and Vietnam yesterday, and dozens of flights cancelled as a typhoon barrelled towards land.

Powerful winds, storm surges and lashing rains were forecast to hammer the southern coastline from Guangdong to Hainan provinces when typhoon Talim makes landfall yesterday night, the China Meteorological Administration said.

The forecaster has issued an orange alert, the second-highest warning in a four-tier colour-coded system, saying the storm was expected to increase in intensity to become a severe typhoon.

Authorities in Vietnam said they were preparing to evacuate about 30,000 people from the areas forecast to be hardest hit



Boats are moored at a typhoon shelter in Tseun Wan as a precaution for the approaching Typhoon Talim in Hong Kong

in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong provinces from yesterday afternoon.

The storm "might be one of the biggest to hit the Gulf of Tonkin in recent years", Vietnam's top disaster response committee said in an online statement.

Tourists have been advised to leave outlying islands and airlines have rescheduled services to avoid the storm.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh directed disaster response teams to prepare for "immediate rescue and relief works" late Sunday, warning of

The Hong Kong Observatory has warned of possible flooding in low-lying areas due to a storm surge and ferries and most bus services in the city were suspended

possible floods.

At least 1,000 people were evacuated in Yunfu city in south China's Guangdong province, the state-backed Southern Daily reported.

Around 2:00 pm (0600 GMT), Typhoon Talim was 280 kilometres southwest of Hong Kong, the city's weather observatory said.

Trading on Hong Kong's US\$5.2 trillion stock market was cancelled yesterday as the Asian financial hub came to a standstill.

US envoy Kerry calls for 'urgent action' on climate at China talks

AFP | Beijing

US climate envoy John Kerry held four hours of talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing yesterday, calling for "urgent action" as the two countries revived stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters came to a halt last year after Nancy Pelosi, then-speaker of the US House of Representatives, enraged Beijing by visiting self-ruled Taiwan, which China considers to be part of its territory.

Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over



US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry

Taiwan and other issues.

Kerry met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing yesterday, with the two men speaking for around four hours, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Both countries "must take urgent action on a number of fronts, especially the challenges of coal and methane pollution," Kerry wrote in a tweet after the talks.

The climate crisis demands that the world's two largest economies work together to limit the Earth's warming

JOHN KERRY

"The climate crisis demands that the world's two largest economies work together to limit the Earth's warming," Kerry tweeted.

Beijing said after the talks that "climate change is a common challenge faced by all mankind".

China would "exchange views with the United States on issues related to climate change, and work together to meet challenges and improve the wellbeing of

current and future generations", foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday Kerry would press Beijing not to "hide behind any kind of claim that they are a developing nation" in order to slow-roll efforts to cut emissions.

"Every country, including China, has a responsibility to reduce emissions," Sullivan said. "And the world, I do believe, should step up and encourage -- indeed, pressure -- China to take far more dramatic action to reduce emissions."

China has long used its official status as a developing nation to justify its high emissions, with Sullivan saying "there is more work for them to do on that front".