

News in brief

◆ **The foreign ministers** of Russia and China met yesterday on the sidelines of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers talks in Laos, Moscow and AFP journalists said. The three-day meeting of the 10-member ASEAN bloc started in the capital Vientiane on Thursday, with the South China Sea and the conflict in Myanmar high on the agenda. Sergei Lavrov held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the meeting, Russia's foreign ministry said. A schedule for Thursday's meeting seen by AFP showed that Lavrov was due to join Wang for a 40-minute "ministerial meeting". Lavrov left the venue at 7.15 pm local time (1215 GMT), without commenting on what the meeting had covered.



Russia, China FMs meet as ASEAN talks get underway in Laos

◆ **Russian President Vladimir Putin** vowed yesterday to crush anybody who tries to divide Russian society as he hailed the effectiveness and unwavering loyalty of his country's powerful law enforcement agencies. Putin has escalated a decades-long crackdown on civil society, independent media and opposition amid his military offensive in Ukraine, with dissent and criticism of the Kremlin outlawed and punishable by years-long prison sentences. "Those who try to intimidate people, to split our society, to play on religious or national feelings will never succeed," Putin said in a video message posted by the Kremlin. "Inevitable and just retribution awaits them," he added.



Putin vows 'retribution' against those trying to 'divide' Russia

◆ **The death toll** from a devastating landslide in southern Ethiopia has risen to 257, the United Nations said yesterday, warning it could increase to up to 500.

The disaster occurred on Monday following heavy rains in a tiny community in a mountainous area of South Ethiopia regional state. The last toll, given by the local authority on Tuesday, was 229. "The death toll has risen to 257," as of July 24, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said in statement on Thursday, citing local authorities. "The death toll is expected to rise to up to 500 people," it said. At the scene in Kencho Shacha Godzi, hundreds of people combed through the sodden red mud as they searched for survivors of the deadliest landslide recorded in Africa's second most populous country. "More than 15,000 affected people need to be evacuated," OCHA said, including at least 1,320 children, as well as 5,293 pregnant women and new mothers.

Ethiopia landslide death toll rises to 257, could reach up to 500: UN



SPOTLIGHT

US defends UNRWA after Israel moves to deem it terror group



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to a joint meeting of Congress at the US Capitol

AFP | Washington, United States

The United States on Wednesday criticized an Israeli bill that would declare the UN agency for Palestinian refugees a terrorist organization, saying that such efforts are "incredibly unhelpful."

"UNRWA is not a terrorist organization, and we urge the Israeli government and the Knesset to halt the movement of this legislation," said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller.

He added that "the attacks that the Israeli government has leveled on UNRWA are incredibly unhelpful. They do nothing to advance the cause of getting humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza."

Israel's parliament, the Knesset, on Monday gave preliminary approval to a bill that designates UNRWA a terrorist organization and proposes

severing all ties with the humanitarian agency.

After passing its first reading, the legislation will go to a parliamentary committee for further deliberation.

UNRWA, which has more than 30,000 employees serving some 5.9 million Palestinian refugees in the region, has been accused by Israel of employing "more than 400 terrorists" in the Gaza Strip.

The United States suspended its financial contributions to the agency after separate unproven Israeli allegations were made that some UNRWA staff were involved in Hamas's October 7 attacks.

Since then, US lawmakers have prohibited Washington from releasing funds to the agency. Several other countries that also withdrew funding for UNRWA have since reinstated their contributions, including Britain, France and the European Union.

UN experts urge halt to violence against Ahmadis in Pakistan

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

United Nations experts yesterday voiced grave concern at reports of surging discrimination and violence against Pakistan's Ahmadi minority community, including extrajudicial killings and attacks on places of worship.

The Ahmadiyya sect, considered heretics by fundamentalist groups, has been persecuted for decades in Pakistan but threats and intimidation have risen in recent years.

"We are alarmed by ongoing reports of violence and discrimination against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan," said the nine independent experts, including the special rapporteurs on extrajudicial executions, on freedom of expression and on freedom of religion.

"Urgent measures are necessary to respond to these violent attacks and the broader atmosphere of hatred and discrimination which feeds it," they said in a statement.

Russian, Chinese bombers stage joint patrol near Alaska



Representative picture

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russian and Chinese jets staged a joint patrol over far eastern Russia and the Bering Sea near Alaska but Moscow and Beijing stressed it was not aimed at any "third party".

Wednesday's flights, with nuclear-capable bombers, came days after Moscow said the United States sent its own strategic bombers close to Russian airspace.

Russia said its "Tu-95MS strategic missile carriers and the Chinese air force's Xian H-6 strategic bombers carried out an aerial patrol over the Chukchi and Bering Seas and the north Pacific Ocean".

The joint US-Canadian North American Aerospace Defense Command earlier said American and Canadian warplanes had intercepted two Russian and two Chinese bombers in international airspace near Alaska on Wednesday.

It said the bombers "remained in international airspace" and were "not seen as a threat".

Moscow said the patrol observed international law and did not breach foreign airspace, adding that "at certain stages of the route, the aviation group was accompanied by fighter jets of foreign countries".

Palestinian Olympic fake of possible Russian origin, security sources and experts said yesterday

AFP | Paris, France

A video that has been widely shared on social media showing a purported Palestinian threatening attacks on France during the Olympic Games in Paris is a fake and could be of Russian origin, security sources and experts said yesterday.

The video has emerged with France preparing to stage an unprecedented opening ceremony along with River Seine on Friday and some sporting action already under way since Wednesday.

The video, posted on social networks including X and Telegram, shows a man with his face covered by a keffiyeh scarf and only his eyes exposed threatening "rivers of blood" during the Olympics.

With a Palestinian flag pinned to his front, the man says such attacks will be retribution for what he describes as French support of



Displaced Palestinians play football in the courtyard of a UN-run school in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip

Israel in its war against Palestinian militant group Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the presence of Israeli athletes at the Olympics.

He finishes by brandishing a bloodied head which appears to be that of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic.

But while the video was widely

shared, many were also quick to cast doubt on its authenticity, noting it was not the style of groups like Hamas to make such videos and also questioning the quality of the speaker's Arabic.

"The French secret services and their partners have not been able to authenticate the veracity

Philippines races to contain spill after oil tanker capsizes off Manila

AFP | Limay, Philippines

A Philippine-flagged tanker carrying 1.4 million litres of industrial fuel oil sank off Manila yesterday, authorities said, as they raced to contain a spill.

One crew member of the MT Terra Nova was killed when the tanker capsized in Manila Bay, nearly seven kilometres (4.3 miles) off Limay municipality in Bataan province, as it sailed to the central city of Iloilo.

The vessel went down in rough seas as heavy rains fuelled by Typhoon Gaemi and the seasonal monsoon lashed



Part of MT Terra Nova oil tanker after it sank off Manila Bay

Manila and surrounding regions in recent days.

An oil slick stretching several kilometres has been detected and the Philippine Coast Guard was preparing to apply dispersants and deploy floating barriers to contain the spill.

Coast guard spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo told a briefing earlier on Thursday authorities were "racing against time" to contain the spill and stop more fuel leaking.

It appeared so far that diesel fuel used to power the tanker was leaking into the sea but not the industrial fuel oil cargo, Balilo said.

He warned that if all the industrial fuel oil in the tanker were to leak, it would be the biggest spill in Philippine history.

"There is a big danger that Manila will be affected, even the shoreline of Manila, if the fuel will leak, because it is within Manila Bay," Balilo said.

Sunita Williams to return soon, hints Nasa



TDT | agencies

Nasa Flight Director Ed Van Cise announced that a subset of the NASA team is working closely with Boeing's CST-100 Starliner spacecraft and its crew members astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams.

This collaboration aims to fine-tune the spacecraft's systems and prepare for its upcoming departure.

The two astronauts have been aboard the Space Station for over a month as work continued on fixing several issues a glitches with the Starliner spacecraft.

Trump attack gunman searched online about 1963 shooting

AFP | Washington, United States

The gunman who attempted to assassinate Donald Trump at a campaign rally searched online for details about the November 1963 shooting of US president John F. Kennedy in the days before the attack, the FBI director said Wednesday.

FBI chief Christopher Wray, testifying before a congressional committee, said the gunman flew a drone over the venue where the former president was scheduled to speak about two hours before he took the stage in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13.

Wray told members of the House Judiciary Committee that



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is evacuated from a rally by Secret Service agents

investigators have not established a motive for the shooting but "we are digging hard because this is one of the central questions for us." Trump survived the assassi-

nation bid, suffering a wound to his right ear, and a Secret Service sniper shot dead the suspected gunman -- named as 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks -- less