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STAY SAFE
STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS

USD	01	GBP	01	INR	1000	PKR	1000	EUR	01	IRR	1000	AED	01
AFN	78.46	AFN	110.14	AFN	1067	AFN	500	AFN	95.31	AFN	0.37	AFN	21.22

US report concluded COVID-19 may have leaked from Wuhan lab: Media

A report on the origins of COVID-19 by a US government national laboratory concluded that the hypothesis claiming the virus leaked from a Chinese lab in Wuhan is plausible and deserves further investigation, The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday, citing people familiar with the classified document.

The study was prepared in May 2020 by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and was referred by the State Department when it conducted an inquiry into the pandemic's origins during the final months of the Trump administration, the report said.

Lawrence Livermore's assessment drew on genomic analysis of the COVID-19 virus, the Journal said.

Lawrence Livermore declined to comment on the Wall Street Journal report.

President Joe Biden said last month he had ordered aides to find answers to the origin of the virus.

US intelligence agencies are considering two likely scenarios - that the virus resulted from a laboratory accident or that it emerged from human contact with an infected animal - but they have not come to a conclusion, he said.

A still-classified US intelligence report circulated during former President Donald Trump's administration alleged that three researchers at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became so ill in November 2019 that they sought hospital care, US government sources said.

US officials have accused China of a lack of transparency on the virus' origin, a charge Beijing has denied.

Russia: JCPOA restoration benefits international community

Russia's representative to the international organizations in Vienna says the restoration of the 2015 nuclear deal would benefit the international community by facilitating trade with Tehran and boosting security in the Middle East.

Mikhail Ulyanov made the remarks in a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s 35-nation Board of Governors in Vienna where talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have dragged on how to bring the US back to compliance.

"The JCPOA restoration is in the interest of the entire international community," he said.

Ulyanaov said the JCPOA facilitates trade and economic cooperation with the Islamic Republic and contributes to security in the Middle East and worldwide.

"Members of the managing board and all pragmatic countries who are seriously concerned about the future of nuclear non-proliferation and international security, need to support the JCPOA talks underway in Vienna," he added.

Envoys from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries — Britain, France, Russia, and China plus Germany — have been holding talks in Vienna aimed at revitalizing the JCPOA and bringing the US back to compliance.

A US delegation is also in the Austrian capital, but it is not attending the discussions because the United States is not a party to the nuclear accord.

Former US president Donald Trump abandoned the deal and reimposed the anti-Iran sanctions that the JCPOA had lifted. He also placed additional sanctions on Iran under other pretexts not related to the nuclear case as part of the "maximum pressure" campaign.

Following a year of strategic patience, Iran resorted to its legal rights stipulated in Article 26 of the JCPOA, which grants a party the right to suspend its contractual commitments in case of noncompliance by other signatories, and let go of some of the restrictions imposed on its nuclear energy program.

Now, the new US administration says it wants to compensate for Trump's mistake and rejoin the deal, but it is showing an overriding propensity for maintaining some of the sanctions as a tool of pressure.

Tehran insists that all sanctions should first be removed in a verifiable manner before the Islamic Republic reverses its remedial measures.

"If the nuclear deal is not restored, all of this will continue and get worse. However, the IAEA has managed to ensure a proper level of transparency on Iran's nuclear program so far .... For all we know, despite certain routine issues, Tehran is ready for cooperation and creates no obstacles for the work of inspectors," Ulyanov said.

EU says committed to JCPOA

On Tuesday, the European Union affirmed what it called "its resolute commitment" to the JCPOA.

"The EU is determined to continue working with the international community to preserve this agreement of strategic importance and a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture," it said in a statement.

Syria responds to 'Israeli aggression' after explosions heard in Damascus

Syria's air defense system has been activated against an "Israeli aggression" within Syria, state news agency Sana said late Tuesday.

Israeli planes arrived from Lebanese air space, said Sana, which gave no indication of any deaths or damage.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, reported "violent explosions felt in Damascus and around the city, followed by Israeli strikes on military positions" of the Syrian army. "Air strikes also took place in the south of Homs province and in the border zone between Homs and Tartus," Observatory chief Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP. The Israeli army, which rarely acknowledges its strikes in Syria, told AFP it would not comment on "information coming from abroad."

Since the start of the war in neighboring Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, targeting regime positions as well as Iranian forces and members of Lebanon's Hezbollah.

UN warns of 'mass deaths' in Myanmar after 100,000 flee fighting

A United Nations rights expert has warned of "mass deaths from starvation, disease and exposure" in eastern Myanmar after "brutal, indiscriminate attacks" by the military forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in Kayah State.

In a statement on Wednesday, Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur for Myanmar, called for urgent international action, saying attacks by the military – which took power after a February coup – were "threatening the lives of many thousands of men, women and children" in Kayah or Karenni state.

"Let me blunt," Andrews said. "Mass deaths from starvation, disease, and exposure, on a scale we have not yet seen since the February 1 coup, could occur in Kayah State absent immediate action."

The plea came hours after the UN office in Myanmar said the violence in Kayah had displaced an estimated 100,000 people, who were now seeking safety in forests, host communities and southern parts of neighbouring Shan state.

Those fleeing and those in locations affected by the bombing and artillery fire were in dire need of food, water, shelter, fuel and access to healthcare, the UN office said in a statement.

"This crisis could push people across international borders seeking safety," it warned, calling for all parties to "take the necessary measures and precautions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure".

Myanmar has been in chaos since the military takeover, with daily protests across the country and fighting in border areas between the military and armed ethnic minority groups. Human rights groups say security forces have killed at least 849 people since the coup and detained 5,800 others.

People living in Kayah told Al Jazeera the military has launched indiscriminate air attacks and shelling in civilian areas after fighting broke out on May 21 between the security forces and a civilian resistance group calling itself the Karenni People's Defense Force (KPDF).

There have been several deaths, including that of a 14-year-old boy who was shot dead in Loikaw township and a young man who was shot in the head with his hands tied behind his back. The military has repeatedly attacked churches in the predominantly Christian area, in one instance killing four people who were among 300 villagers sheltering at a Catholic church in Loikaw.

Security forces have also attacked and threatened humanitarian workers, while Andrews said he had received reports that soldiers were "stopping aid from reaching these desperate people" by setting up military blockades and laying landmines on public roads.

"Any pressure or leverage UN member states can put on the junta must now be exerted so that junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will immediately: (1): open access roads and allow lifesaving aid to reach those in need, and (2) stop terrorizing the population by ceasing the aerial bombardment, shelling, and shooting of civilians."

Fire at factory in Iran's Alborz province injures 24

A fire broke out in a food factory in Iran's Alborz province on Tuesday, causing injuries to 24 people, Iranian media reported.

No explanation was given for the cause of the fire, but Mehrdad Babaei, head of the medical emergencies center in Alborz, said that it was not large and that it was contained quickly, according to the semi-official ISNA news agency.

"Except for one of the injured who has severe injuries, the other injured in this accident are in stable condition," Babaei said.

Iranian domestic media have reported at least four fires since last Wednesday, when the largest ship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances.

Later the same day, a massive fire broke out at the Shahid Tondgooyan refinery in Shahr-e-Rey, south of the capital Tehran.

There have been dozens of mysterious fires and explosions across Iran since 2020, including at sensitive military and nuclear sites.

Australia feels pressure after refugee girl airlifted to hospital

Three-year-old Tharunicca Murugappan fighting a life-threatening blood infection while her family pleads to release them from detention since 2018.

An Australian-born toddler is fighting a life-threatening disease at a hospital in Perth, as advocates for migrants and refugees press Australia's government to take action on her family's long drawn-out resettlement case.

Three-year-old Tharunicca Murugappan, whose family is of Tamil origin from Sri Lanka, was medically evacuated on Monday from the immigration detention centre on Christmas Island to Perth Children's Hospital, two weeks after she caught a blood infection, which is believed to be linked to untreated pneumonia.

Tharunicca's mother, Priya, accompanied her to the hospital, while her father, Nadesalingam, and elder sister, Kopika, remain in detention on the island, which is south of Indonesia's Java and has been described by rights groups as a prison-like camp.

Priya was quoted by news reports as saying that medical workers at Christmas Island repeatedly refused to allow her youngest daughter to be taken to the hospital.

"I want to thank everybody for their love and good wishes," Priya said in a video message as she cradled her daughter.

"We hope that Tharunicca can get the help she needs now. Please, help us to get her out of detention and home to Biloela."

Supporters of the Murugappan family are scheduled to hold candelight vigils outside the hospital on Wednesday evening and at Sydney Town Hall on Thursday to pressure the government to resettle the family, who were living in the town of Biloela in Queensland when they were taken away by authorities.

Human Rights Commissioner Ed Santow was quoted by Australia's ABC News as saying that under international law, there is almost no justification to hold Tharunicca and her parents in immigration detention, and that Christmas Island poses real health risks.

"We know that people in immigration detention are disproportionately likely to have significant health issues," he said.

"And for that reason alone we've expressed deep concern about using a facility like Christmas Island for detention" because of its distance from a major health facility.

Sarah Hanson-Young, a senator from South Australia, wrote on social media, "No child's suffering is worth any Prime Minister's ego or stubbornness."