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USD	01	GBP	01	INR	1000	PKR	1000	EUR	01	IRR	1000	AED	01
AFN	78.45	AFN	110.04	AFN	1067	AFN	500	AFN	95.82	AFN	0.37	AFN	21.22

Germany and Hungary clash on EU-China relations

Germany and Hungary have butted heads over EU policy on Hong Kong, in a dispute which made the EU foreign service look silly.

"We can't let ourselves be held hostage by the people who hobble European foreign policy with their vetoes," German foreign minister Heiko Maas told German ambassadors at a meeting in Berlin on Monday (7 June), according to the Reuters news agency.

"If you do that, then, sooner or later, you're risking the cohesion of Europe," he added.

"The veto has to go, even if that means we [Germany] can be outvoted," the German minister also said, referring to EU foreign-policy making by consensus.

Maas' remarks were aimed at Hungary, which recently stymied an EU statement of moral support for pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong - just one in a long line of Hungarian vetoes.

"Hungary again blocked an EU statement on Hong Kong. Three weeks ago, it was on the Middle East," Miguel Berger, a state secretary in the German foreign ministry, had also said on Friday.

"We need a serious debate on ... qualified majority voting", he said.

Hungary does not normally explain to media or even fellow EU diplomats why it vetoes things.

But Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán hit back at Germany in an invective on his website the same day that Maas spoke out.

"The European left - led by the German left - is once again attacking Hungary in a contemptible manner. This time it is for our country's refusal to sign a politically inconsequential and frivolous joint declaration on Hong Kong," Orbán said on Monday.

He also struck out at EU foreign policy more broadly, which he called a "laughing stock".

"When eight of our joint declarations have been swept aside, as has happened with China, the ninth will simply be greeted with more mockery," Orbán said.

"We will exercise our rights guaranteed by the European Union's founding treaties," he added, referring to Hungary's foreign-policy veto.

And he said Europe should do business with countries such as China, which has an egregious human-rights record, instead of issuing "boycotts, sanctions, sermons, and lectures".

The draft EU member states' communiqué on Hong Kong was first discussed in early May.

It was later downgraded to a statement by EU foreign-affairs chief Josep Borrell on behalf of EU capitals, but Orbán also blocked that when it came up for discussion among EU ambassadors in Brussels last week.

"The longer we wait, the more out of date the [Hong Kong] statement becomes, but it's still on the table," an EU diplomat told EUobserver on Monday.

Meanwhile, the dispute has made Borrell look silly because, on 11 May, he issued an ultimatum that he failed to live up to.

"If unanimity is not reached ... we will have to take a position which does not reflect unanimity", Borrell said at the time.

"We will continue working [on Hungary's objections] for one more week ... just one more week", he said.

When asked on Monday how come he did not keep his word to issue a statement on behalf of 26 EU countries without Hungary, Borrell's spokesman told EUobserver: "The work is continuing and the result should be visible soon". "[Borrell] continues to work intensively to achieve EU unity where possible and broad majority when unanimity is not possible," the spokesman said.

The next EU foreign-policy decision is to roll over EU sanctions on Russia-occupied Crimea for another year when EU ambassadors meet in Brussels on Wednesday.

But diplomats expected this to go through despite Orbán's anti-sanctions views and close Russia ties.

Voting unlikely

Germany's call for majority voting in foreign policy is not new.

Maas called for it already two years ago and Borrell recently proposed using it in "implementing acts", such as deciding which names to list under EU human-rights or chemical-weapons sanctions.

But it would take unanimity to waive unanimity, in a freak of the EU treaty, and while Germany has wider support, for instance, from Finland, several smaller member states do not want to give up their prerogative.

"It's not just Hungary which is sceptical about this," an EU diplomat said.

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. Alarabiya

Eighteen dead in India chemical plant fire

Some 37 workers were trapped inside the building when the blaze started around 15:45 local time (10:15 GMT) on Monday.

Fire engines rushed to the spot as smoke billowed from the compound - firemen had to break walls on either side to rescue people.

The cause of the fire has not yet been determined, officials told BBC Marathi.

The factory belonged to SV Aqua Technologies, a company that makes chlorine dioxide products, which is typically used in water treatment.

It was located in what is known as the the Pirangut industrial estate, home to several other factories and plants, some 16km (10 miles) from Pune. Most of the workers live close by.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences over the death of the workers, and announced 200,000 rupees ($2,800; £1,900) as compensation for their families. He also promised $690 as compensation for the injured.

The government of Maharashtra, where the factory is located, also announced $6,800 as compensation to the victims' families. BBC

ANOM: Hundreds arrested in massive global crime sting using messaging app

The operation, jointly conceived by Australia and the FBI, saw devices with the ANOM app secretly distributed among criminals, allowing police to monitor their chats about drug smuggling, money laundering and even murder plots.

Drugs, weapons, luxury vehicles and cash were also seized in the operation. This included eight tons of cocaine, 250 guns and more than $48m (£34m) in various worldwide currencies and cryptocurrencies.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the operation had "struck a heavy blow against organised crime" around the world.

Europol described Operation Trojan Shield/Greenlight as the "biggest ever law enforcement operation against encrypted communication".

How did the ANOM sting work?

The FBI began operating its own encrypted device company called ANOM, and covertly distributed devices with the chat app among the criminal underworld via informants.

The devices were initially used by alleged senior crime figures, giving other criminals the confidence to use the platform.

"You had to know a criminal to get hold of one of these customised phones. The phones couldn't ring or email. You could only communicate with someone on the same platform," the police explained.

Australian fugitive drug trafficker Hakan Ayik was key to the sting, having unwittingly recommended the app to criminal associates after being given a handset by undercover officers, police said.

Dubbed the "Facebook gangster" by Australian media outlets, Ayik is seen in social media photographs with large tattoos and a

muscular physique. Local outlets say he has been living in Turkey since evading arrest, living a luxury lifestyle with a Dutch wife.

Police said he was "best off handing himself into us" as soon as possible, as he may be in danger himself.

In total, some 12,000 encrypted devices were used by around 300 criminal syndicates in more than 100 countries.

What did the authorities uncover?

Officers were able to read millions of messages in "real time" describing murder plots, mass drug import plans and other schemes.

"All they talk about is drugs, violence, hits on each other, innocent people who are going to be murdered, a whole range of of things," said Australian Federal Police commissioner Reece Kershaw.

He added that police were also able to prevent incidents of mass shootings.

In total, 224 people were arrested in the country, including members of outlaw motorcycle gangs, Australian mafia groups, Asian crime syndicates, and serious and organised crime groups.

Australian police said they also seized three tonnes of drugs and A$45m (£25m; $35m) in cash and assets, and acted on 20 "threats to kill", potentially saving the lives of a "significant number of innocent bystanders".

Authorities said their sting, which they called Operation Ironside, was the nation's largest police operation and involved 4,000 police officers.

Motorbikes seized in Australiaimage copyrightAustralian Federal Police

"Knocking out their communications has been a key part of us disrupting the organised crime," Commissioner Kershaw said.

He said the app access had given law enforcement "an edge that it had never had before", but added the platform was just one of many messaging apps favoured by organised crime gangs.

New Zealand police said 35 people in the country had been arrested, and about NZ$3.7m (£1.9m, $2.7m) of assets seized.

"We believe the termination of these operations will have a significant impact on New Zealand's organised crime scene," National Organised Crime Group Director Detective Superintendent Greg Williams said.

In Europe, Europol's deputy executive director Jean-Philippe Lecouffe described the operation as an "exceptional success".

The FBI is expected to present more details later on Tuesday.

BBC

Turkey must stop occupation of Iraq's northern Kurdistan region, senior lawmaker says

A senior Iraqi MP has denounced Turkey's deployment of troops to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region where they are pressing ahead with a military campaign against PKK militants, saying Ankara must end its occupation of the Iraqi territories.

"What is happening within the borders of the Kurdistan region represents a dangerous escalation by the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)," the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) quoted Chairman of the Security and Defense Committee in the Iraqi Parliament Mohammed Rida Al Haidar as saying.

"The Constitution does not allow the presence of refugees with affiliation to militant groups on the Iraqi soil," he said in a televised statement.

Al Haidar also categorically denied the existence of any agreement between Baghdad and Ankara regarding the ongoing military offensive in the Kurdistan region.

"There are only temporary and conditional understandings with Turkey," he said, stressing that "Turkey should not exploit the current situation in Iraq."

Turkey plans to build base in northern Iraq as it did in Syria: Report

Turkey reportedly plans to build a new military base in Iraq's northern border areas, where the Turkish military has been engaged in an operation against Kurdish militants.

He said, "The central government [in Baghdad] and the command center of [Kurdish] Peshmerga military forces must coordinate in the wake of the Turkish occupation."

Al-Haidar also emphasized that there is no intelligence cooperation between Iraq and Turkey regarding the pursuit of PKK militants.

"The Turkish government must stop fighting, and instead support the Iraqi government's efforts to arrive at solutions," the top Iraqi lawmaker pointed out.

Back on May 3, Iraqi Foreign Ministry summoned Turkish chargé d'affairs in Baghdad to submit a letter of protest over Ankara's violations in the Kurdistan region, including the presence of the Turkish defense minister in the area without prior coordination.

"The Iraqi government expresses its strong dissatisfaction and condemnation regarding the presence of Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar in Iraqi territories without coordination or prior approval by competent authorities, and his meeting with Turkish forces who are illegally present in the region," Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar al-Khairallah said in a statement at the time.

The ministry also denounced Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu's statements about establishing a permanent Turkish military base in northern Iraq.

Turkish military forces launched operations Pence-Simsek and Pence-Yildirim on April 23 in northern Iraq's Metina and Avasin-Basyan regions in pursuit of PKK militants.

Turkish military forces wrest control over a village in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region as they continue their operations against PKK militants.

PKK Militants — designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union — regularly clash with Turkish forces in the Kurdish-dominated southeast of Turkey attached to northern Iraq.

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