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USD	01	GBP	01	INR	1000	PKR	1000	EUR	01	IRR	1000	AED	01
AFN	79.92	AFN	110.51	AFN	1084	AFN	498	AFN	94.57	AFN	0.37	AFN	21.22

Qantas stands down 2,500 staff over Sydney lockdown

The furlough - affecting pilots, crew and airport workers - will last for at least two months, the airline said.

Qantas said it would pay staff until mid-August, after which they could apply for government support payments.

Since June, fresh Covid outbreaks have forced most Australian states to reimpose restrictions.

The highly contagious Delta variant has forced lockdowns in several cities and some state border closures.

The situation is most severe in Sydney. It is seeing about 200 new infections each day, despite being in lockdown since 26 June.

Nearly all states have banned travellers from Australia's largest city.

Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce said the latest Delta outbreaks had led to thousands of cancelled flights.

Qantas and its budget carrier, Jetstar, had lost about 60% of their domestic business from May to July, he added.

A travel bubble with New Zealand has also been suspended.

Mr Joyce said the airline could no longer keep the 2,500 workers on its payroll, but described it as a temporary measure.

"This is clearly the last thing we want to do," he said.

But he added it was "also very different from this time last year when we had more than 20,000 employees stood down".

Last year, Qantas was forced to axe about 6,000 staff - about a fifth of its workforce.

media captionAustralia's vaccine rollout a "colossal failure", ex-PM Malcolm Turnbull says

In May, the airline said it would report an annual loss of more than A$2bn (£1.1bn; $1.5bn) but hoped for a rebound in domestic travel.

On Tuesday, Mr Joyce said domestic travel could return to 50-60% of normal levels with the expected reopening of Victoria and South Australia.

Qantas has not been able to resume international routes - except to New Zealand - due to Australia's international border closure.

The airline has previously said it's losing about A$2.3m a week from its international division. BBC

Death toll in China's Henan floods triples to 302, dozens missing

The death toll from last month's devastating floods in central China has risen to 302 with dozens of people still missing, according to officials, tripling the number of fatalities reported last week.

Zhengzhou, the state capital of Henan province, was hardest hit with 292 people dead and 47 missing, the local government said at a news briefing on Monday. Three people remain missing in other areas of the province.

Zhengzhou, home to 12 million people, saw a year's worth of rain in just three days and residents found themselves trapped in underground train carriages, car parks and road tunnels by the swiftly rising waters.

Mayor Hou Hong told reporters that 39 bodies had been recovered from underground car parks and other areas in basements. Some 14 people died on Line 5 of the city's subterranean train network where images and videos shared on social media showed people standing neck-deep in water as their carriage was inundated.

Some 617.1 millimetres (24.3 inches) of rain fell on Zhengzhou over three days from July 17, nearly equivalent to the city's annual average of 640.8mm (25.2 inches).

Experts say extreme weather events, including severe floods and drought, will become increasingly common as a result of climate change.

On Monday, the State Council – China's cabinet – announced an investigative team would examine the handling of the floods and propose measures to improve disaster prevention, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

City and provincial officials have faced calls for accountability, with the wife of one of the subway victims telling local media she would sue the metro operator for negligence.

News of the death toll enraged China's social media users who demanded better disaster management protocols and criticised the government's response.

"Can we do a good check of Zhengzhou's drainage system?" a resident wrote on Weibo.

"We're digging and building roads every day … change the leadership and do it all over again, all the money has been spent on superficial things!"

But criticism of the government's handling of the disaster has also prompted hostility.

A large floral tribute at the still-closed Zhengzhou metro system was sealed off last week by authorities and foreign journalists covering the floods have been harassed online and on the ground.

The Foreign Correspondents Club of China said it was "very concerned" at the anger directed towards international media covering the disaster, noting incidents involving reporters working for the BBC, Deutsche Welle, the Los Angeles Times, Associated Press and Agence France Presse.

The team from Al Jazeera English were also followed and filmed while reporting from outside the flooded metro system.

The United States has said it was "deeply concerned" over the harassment and intimidation of foreign correspondents covering the disaster. Aljazeera

US accuses Myanmar generals of 'stalling', urges ASEAN pressure

The United States has accused Myanmar's military generals of playing for time after coup leader Min Aung Hlaing extended the deadline for new elections, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) to step up efforts to resolve the political turmoil triggered by the power grab.

Blinken is participating virtually this week in talks with foreign ministers from ASEAN, whose 10 members include Myanmar.

At a special summit in April, the group agreed to a five-point plan to address the deteriorating situation in Myanmar, including an end to violence and the appointment of a special envoy to lead diplomatic initiatives.

But the crackdown has continued and on Sunday, in a speech to mark six months since the coup, Min Aung Hlaing said a state of emergency imposed after the coup would remain in force until August 2023, with new elections to take place more than a year later than initially promised.

The announcement is "a call for ASEAN to have to step up its effort because it's clear that the Burmese junta is just stalling for time and wants to keep prolonging the calendar to its own advantage," said an unnamed senior US official, using Myanmar's former name of Burma.

"All the more reason why ASEAN has to engage on this and live up and uphold the terms of the five-point consensus that Myanmar also signed up to."

Although Min Aung Hlaing attended the April meeting, he later distanced himself from the statement and more than 900 people have been reported killed in the six-month crackdown on anti-coup protests.

Two ASEAN diplomats told the Associated Press news agency on Tuesday that the bloc wants to designate Brunei Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof as special envoy to Myanmar, but are waiting on approval from the military.

Myanmar did not immediately react to the choice, preventing the ministers from issuing a post-conference joint communique that would have reflected the key development, the diplomats said.

One of the Southeast Asian diplomats said Myanmar preferred the special envoy be the candidate from Thailand, former Thai ambassador to Myanmar Virasakdi Futrakul.

Even if Myanmar were to get its preferred choice, it remains uncertain if and when the nation's military leaders would allow access to civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained with other political leaders and put on trial for a slew of charges, said the diplomats.

The flurry of diplomatic activities come amid a backdrop of continuing political turmoil in Myanmar as well as a health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were reports of scattered anti-military government protests on Monday and Tuesday, according to social media posts.

In Win Chone village, in Pauk Township in Myanmar's northwest, there were reports on Tuesday of at least 50 homes destroyed by security forces.

At least 330 deaths from COVID-19 were reported on Tuesday, pushing the total toll above 10,000, although the real number of fatalities is believed to be much higher. More than 300,000 have officially been reported to have contracted the disease.

Meanwhile, the shadow National Unity Government (NUG), composed mostly of deposed civilian leaders of parliament, are appealing for humanitarian help following flooding and landslides in Mon and Kayin states.

The NUG promised to continue "providing assistance to the disaster affected areas".

"Beijing's coercion"

Aside from Myanmar, Washington wants to reassure Southeast Asia of its commitment to the region and hopes Blinken's participation in five consecutive days of regional meetings will show the administration of President Joe Biden is serious about engaging with its allies and partners in Southeast Asia.

The US official said Blinken would address Beijing's "coercion" against ASEAN nations in the disputed South China Sea and highlight human rights concerns in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Southeast Asia last week, where he discussed the South China Sea, and reiterated that Beijing's claims to almost the entire waterway had no basis in international law.

Vice President Kamala Harris plans this month to visit historic US partner Singapore as well as Vietnam, which has moved increasingly close to Washington despite war injustices.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi is expected to meet Blinken in person in Washington this week, while Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman earlier visited Indonesia and Thailand as well as Cambodia – often seen as one of the most pro-Beijing ASEAN nations.

Aside from the US-ASEAN ministerial talks, Blinken will also participate virtually this week in ministerial meetings of the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Mekong-US Partnership and the Friends of the Mekong initiative.

Vitaly Shishov: Head of Belarus exiles group found dead in Ukraine

The head of a group helping people flee Belarus has been found dead near his home in neighbouring Ukraine.

Vitaly Shishov's body was found hanged in a park in Kyiv, a day after he failed to return from a jog. Police have opened a murder inquiry.

Police said they were investigating whether he had been killed and his death made to look like suicide.

Mr Shishov led the Belarusian House in Ukraine, helping those who left Belarus after a violent crackdown. Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania in particular have become favoured destinations for those fleeing persecution following a disputed presidential election in Belarus in August 2020.

Why wearing the wrong socks is risky in Belarus

Friends of Mr Shishov reported that he had been followed recently, Belarusian journalist Tadeusz Giczan said in a tweet on Monday.

He added that Ukrainian border forces had been made aware of the case.

The Belarusian House in Ukraine provides support to new arrivals in finding accommodation, jobs and legal advice, its website says. Meanwhile a Belarusian athlete competing in the Tokyo Olympics was granted a humanitarian visa from Poland after refusing her team's order to fly home early.

Sprinter Krystina Timanovskaya, 24, said she had forcibly taken to the airport for criticising coaches, and voiced fears for her safety.

media captionKrystina Timanovskaya asked the International Olympic Committee for help

Earlier this year, there was an international outcry over the detention of opposition Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend, after the Ryanair plane they were travelling on was forced to land in the country.

Wuhan: Chinese city to test entire population after virus resurfaces

Authorities in the Chinese city of Wuhan will begin testing its entire population, after a handful of positive coronavirus cases were detected there.

Wuhan has recorded seven locally transmitted cases - the first local infections in more than a year.

The city of 11 million people shot into the spotlight after the coronavirus was first detected there in 2019.

China is currently seeing one of its biggest outbreaks in months, with 300 cases detected in 10 days.

Some 15 provinces across the country have been affected, which has led to the government rolling out mass testing measures and lockdown restrictions.

Authorities have attributed the spread of the virus to the highly contagious Delta variant and the domestic tourism season.

The announcement in Wuhan came as China reported 90 new virus cases on Tuesday.

The National Health Commission said 61 of these were locally transmitted - compared with 55 local cases a day earlier.

China had been largely successful in controlling the virus within its borders.

However, this new spread, which was first detected among workers at a busy airport in Nanjing, has sparked concern.

Authorities have tested the 9.2 million residents of Nanjing three times and imposed lockdown on hundreds of thousands of people.

But over the weekend the spotlight turned to popular tourist destination Zhangjiajie in Hunan province, where many of the latest cases have emerged. Travellers from Nanjing were thought to have visited the city recently.

Health officials have zeroed in on a theatre in Zhangjiajie, and are now trying to track down about 5,000 people who attended performances and then travelled back to their home cities.

"Zhangjiajie has now become the new ground zero for China's epidemic spread," Zhong Nanshan, China's leading respiratory disease expert, told reporters.

The new outbreak has also reached the capital Beijing, with the city reporting several locally transmitted infections. BBC