



Myanmar junta charges Japanese journalist with encouraging dissent

Crisis-hit Lebanon hits new lows, years after mega-blast



PHNOM PENH: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (5L) poses for a group photo with other officials during the US ministerial meeting as part of the 55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting at the Sokha Hotel in Phnom Penh, on August 4, 2022. —AFP

Taiwan tensions spark open conflicts

China launches massive military drills off Taiwan

PHNOM PENH: Southeast Asian foreign ministers urged restraint Thursday as China launched massive military drills off Taiwan, warning the situation risked spiraling into "open conflicts".

"We and countries around the world believe that escalation serves no one and could have unintended consequences that serve no one's interests including ASEAN members and including China."



Southeast Asian foreign ministers urge restraint

from our countries to travel internationally," he tweeted. Kung Phoak, Cambodia's deputy foreign minister and ASEAN spokesman, urged both sides to stabilize the situation.

Miscalculation fear

ASEAN is split between countries with close ties to China, such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, and others that are warier of Beijing and its growing international assertiveness.

to play a constructive role in facilitating peaceful dialogue", though it is not clear either side is interested in outside mediation.

"All parties should consider how they can contribute to de-escalating current tensions," Wong told AFP. "One of the risks the region is concerned about is the risk of miscalculation."

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is attending the talks along with his US counterpart Antony Blinken, though they are not expected to hold a one-on-one meeting.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, also in Phnom Penh, condemned the Chinese response. "There is no justification to use a visit as pretext for aggressive military activity in the Taiwan Strait. It is normal and routine for legislators

none has shown an appetite for backing Taipei against the communist giant.

The ministers' statement-which avoided referring to Taiwan by name-said ASEAN "stands ready

Seoul: Pelosi DMZ visit sends clear message to North

SEOUL: After her high-profile trip to Taiwan, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was in South Korea Thursday where her agenda included a visit to the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) - but not a meeting with the country's president.

Yoon, who spoke to Pelosi by phone but did not meet her in person as he is officially on holiday this week, is facing growing domestic criticism over his perceived snub of the second in line to the US Presidency.

"What should we make of the fact that [Yoon] is watching a play and have a gathering [with the actors] but not meeting the US House Speaker?"

Yoon took office in May, vowing to boost ties with the United States, including ramping up the joint military drills that always infuriate North Korea, which views them as rehearsals for invasion.

But those talks collapsed and North Korea has conducted a record-breaking blitz of weapons tests so far this year, including firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017.

At a brief press conference in Seoul, during which she did not take any questions, Pelosi hailed the "special" relationship between South Korea and the United States - but made no mention of her visit to Taipei.

Explosions, fire hit Berlin forest

BERLIN: An "unprecedented" fire broke out Thursday around a German police munitions storage site in a popular forest in western Berlin, sending plumes of smoke into the skies and setting off explosions.

"It would be much more difficult if there were residential buildings nearby," she said. Firefighters called to the site in the middle of the night were confronted with intermittent blasts that sent debris flying and hindered their work.

Police said they were investigating what set off the fire. The store holds munitions uncovered by police, but also unexploded World War II-era ordnance which is regularly dug up during construction works.

Berlin fire brigade spokesman Thomas Kirstein said the situation was "under control and there was no danger for Berliners" but that the fire was expected to last for some time.

Water cannons were also deployed around the safety zone to prevent the fire from spreading. Berlin mayor Franziska Giffey interrupted her holiday to visit the scene, calling the events "unprecedented in the post-war history of Berlin".

But authorities said no firefighting choppers were available as they were already in use to calm forest fires in eastern Germany. They also said the 1,000-metre safety zone applied to the air, so there was a limit to how useful it would be to drop water on the fire from above.



SEOUL: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and South Korean National Assembly speaker Kim Jin-pyo attend a joint press announcement after their meeting at the National Assembly in Seoul on August 4, 2022. —AFP

special to us," she said, adding that the bond which was forged during the Korean war "from urgency and security... has become the warmest of friendships."

It has since launched massive military drills around the island. China is North Korea's key ally and trade partner. Pyongyang on Wednesday echoed Beijing's criticism of the Pelosi visit to Taiwan, describing it as "impudent interference" in China's internal affairs and blaming Washington for raising regional tensions.



BERLIN: Policemen stand in front of the firefighters' operations management vehicle near Grunewald forest in Berlin after a large fire broke out in the popular forest following an explosion in a police munitions storage site on August 4, 2022. —AFP

Brandenburg, the region surrounding Berlin, as well as parts of eastern Germany have for days been battling forest fires. Temperatures are expected to climb as high as 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) across parts of Germany on Thursday.

US Senate ratifies Finland, Sweden's accession to NATO

WASHINGTON: The US Senate ratified the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO Wednesday, strongly backing the expansion of the transatlantic alliance in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden hailed the Senate's quick ratification process - the fastest since 1981. "This historic vote sends an important signal of the sustained, bipartisan US commitment to NATO, and to ensuring our Alliance is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow," Biden said in a statement.

The sole opponent was Republican Josh Hawley, who agreed that the United States should focus on protecting its homeland, but that Washington should concentrate on the challenge from China rather than Europe.

"Putin has tried to use his war in Ukraine to divide the West. Instead, today's vote shows our alliance is stronger than ever," he said. All 30 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization must agree if Finland and Sweden, officially non-aligned but longtime adjunct partners of the alliance, are admitted.

Only Turkey has raised a challenge, demanding certain concessions from Finland and Sweden to back their memberships. Ankara has demanded the extradition of dozens of government opponents it labels "terrorists" from both countries in exchange for its support.