

# Daily Express

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## Coronavirus toll

## 511,312 deaths at 1100 GMT yesterday

**PARIS** - The novel coronavirus has killed at least 511,312 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday (July 1)

At least 10,509,550 cases of coronavirus have been registered in 196 countries and territories. Of these, at least 5,302,100 are now considered recovered.

The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections. Many countries are testing only symptomatic or the most serious cases. The United States is the worst-hit country with 127,425 deaths from 2,636,538 cases. At least 720,631 people have been declared recovered.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 59,594 deaths from 1,402,041 cases, the United Kingdom with 43,730 deaths from 312,654 cases, Italy with 34,767 deaths from 240,578 cases, and France with 29,843 deaths from 201,208 cases. China - excluding Hong Kong and Macau - has to date declared 83,534 cases (3 new since Tuesday - June 30), including 4,634 deaths, and 78,479 recoveries.

Europe overall has 197,257 deaths from 2,740,682 cases, the United States and Canada 136,060 deaths from 2,685,179 infections, Latin America and the Caribbean 116,459 deaths from 2,587,730 cases, Asia 35,023 deaths from 1,322,495 cases, Middle East 16,278 deaths from 759,198 cases, Africa 10,102 deaths from 404,945 cases, and Oceania 133 deaths from 9,328 cases.

**-AFP**

## In Sri Lanka

Seven individuals were confirmed as COVID-19 positive by 9:30 p.m. yesterday (July 1), taking Sri Lanka's tally of the novel coronavirus infection to 2054. Thirty seven patients were deemed recovered and discharged from hospitals across the country, moving up the number of COVID-19 recovered cases to 1748. Two hundred and ninety five are now recorded as active cases receiving treatment.

## WHO says

## Over 160,000 coronavirus cases reported every day in past week

**GENEVA**- The global coronavirus pandemic is accelerating, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday (July 1), pointing out that June saw more than half of all cases reported since the start of the pandemic.

"For the past week, the number of the new cases has exceeded 160,000 on every single day," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing.

"Sixty per cent of all cases so far have been reported just in the past month," he said.

With over 511,000 deaths and more than 10.5 million known infections worldwide, the coronavirus pandemic is "not even close to being over", the WHO warned earlier this week.

Tedros reiterated that taking a "comprehensive approach" was the best way to rein in the virus.

Countries that have implemented a wide range of measures, including contact tracing, isolation, physical distancing and mask wearing "have suppressed transmission and saved lives", he said. The UN health agency was therefore very concerned, he said, to see that a number of countries "have not used all the tools at their disposal and have taken a fragmented approach.

"These countries face a long, hard road ahead," he said.

He stressed that while the pandemic posed a scientific challenge, "it's also a test of character."

**-Agencies**

## In landslide vote

## Russians grant Putin right to extend his rule until 2036

**MOSCOW** - Russians appeared to have paved the way for Vladimir Putin to stay in power until 2036 by voting overwhelmingly for a package of constitutional changes which will also boost pensions, initial results of a nationwide vote showed yesterday (July 1).

Partial results, announced five hours before polls closed, indicate the former KGB officer who has ruled Russia for more than two decades as president or prime minister will win the right to run for two more terms. That means he could remain president for 16 more years.

The Central Election Commission said just over 70% of votes counted across the world's largest country had supported changing the Constitution. Almost 29% had voted no of the 2.68% of ballots counted. Fuller

results were due at 1900 GMT.

Russians have been encouraged to vote with prize draws offering flats and an ad campaign highlighting other constitutional amendments in the same reform bundle, such as the pensions' protection and a de facto ban on same-sex marriages.

One-off payments of 10,000 roubles (\$141) were transferred to those with children at Putin's order as people headed to polling stations yesterday, the last day of the vote, held over seven days to try to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Turnout had reached nearly 60% by midday, election officials said. The required turnout is 50% and the amendments will pass if they are backed by a simple majority of voters.

**-Agencies**



**- theguardian.com**

Aerial images of some of the elephant carcasses seen in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. More than 350 elephants have died in northern Botswana in a mysterious mass die-off described by scientists as a "conservation disaster." A cluster of elephant deaths was first reported in the Okavango Delta in early May, with 169 individuals dead by the end of the month. By mid-June, the number had more than doubled, with 70% of the deaths clustered around waterholes, according to local sources who wish to remain anonymous.

"This is a mass die-off on a level that hasn't been seen in a very, very long time. Outside of drought, I don't know of a die-off that has been this significant," said Dr Niall McCann, the director of conservation at UK-based charity National Park Rescue. The Botswana government has not yet tested samples so there is no information on what is causing the deaths or whether they could pose a risk to human health. The two main possibilities are poisoning or an unknown pathogen. Anthrax - initially considered the most

likely cause - has been ruled out. Local witnesses say some elephants were seen walking around in circles, which is an indication of neurological impairment. Elephants of all ages and both sexes have been dying, local reports found. Several live elephants appeared weak and emaciated, suggesting more will die in the coming weeks. The true number of deaths is likely to be even higher because carcasses can be difficult to spot, say conservationists. There are about 15,000 elephants in the delta, 10% of the country's total

## UN adopts resolution calling for pandemic-related halt to conflicts

**UNITED NATIONS** - The UN Security Council yesterday (July 1) unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a halt to conflicts to facilitate the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, after more than three months of painstaking negotiations, diplomats said.

The resolution, drafted by France and Tunisia, calls for "an immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations" on the Security Council's agenda.

It is the Security Council's first statement on the pandemic and its first real action since the outbreak started.

Tunisia's ambassador to the UN, Kais Kabtani, hailed it as a "historic achievement" but experts questioned whether the text would have any im-

pact and say the paralysis undermined the Council's credibility.

Repeatedly blocked by China and the United States, which opposed a reference in the text to the World Health Organization (WHO), the resolution aims to support an appeal in March by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a global ceasefire.

It "calls upon all parties to armed conflicts to engage immediately in a durable humanitarian pause for at least 90 consecutive days, in order to enable the safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance."

Fighting against jihadist insurgent groups is excluded.

The new text makes no reference to WHO, which the US has criticized for its management of the crisis. Washington opposed any mention of WHO back in May.

The body's paralysis for more than three months has been widely criticized, including by some members who have described their "shame" over its inaction.

During the negotiations, the United States and China, the two largest financial contributors to the UN, had both threatened to veto resolutions.

According to diplomats, Indonesia, a non-permanent member of the Security Council, helped broker a compromise that saw a reference to a General

Assembly commitment to supporting the World Health Organization added to the preamble.

The vague reference was deemed satisfactory to China, which wanted to emphasize the importance of WHO, and the US, which broke away from the UN body over its handling of the pandemic.

Yesterday, Guterres welcomed the fact that his ceasefire request was supported by nearly 180 countries and more than 20 armed groups, but he acknowledged that it had not been followed up with concrete action.

A second meeting on the pandemic is scheduled for today (2).

**-AFP**

## China announces new retaliation against US news outlets

**BEIJING** - China yesterday (July 1) demanded that US news organizations provide the government with information about their staffs, finances and real estate holdings inside the country, in what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said was retaliation for the Trump administration's recent actions against Chinese news outlets in the United States.

The Chinese government stopped short, however, of announcing the expulsions of journalists at any of the four American organizations: The Associated Press, CBS News, National Public Radio and United Press International.

The action is the latest in a series of tit-for-tat clashes over the treatment of journalists, part of an intensifying rivalry between the two powers.

In March, China required five other US media organizations to submit information about their operations. It also expelled al-

most all of the American journalists working for three of them: The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post.

The expulsions followed a decision by the Trump administration in February to designate China's five preeminent State-run news organizations as foreign government functionaries, subject to rules similar to those that apply to diplomatic missions. The administration in March also reduced the number of Chinese State-media employees permitted to work in the United States from 160 to 100.

Then, in June, the administration listed four additional Chinese news agencies as foreign missions.

Yesterday's move came as China began to enforce a new national security law in Hong Kong that limits free expression in the semi-autonomous territory, raising doubts about reporters' ability to effectively cover China from anywhere in the country.

**-NYT**

## After new China law

## UK offers Hong Kongers immigration rights

**LONDON**- Britain yesterday (July 1) extended Hong Kong residents immigration rights after calling China's new security law for Hong Kong a "serious" violation of the former UK territory's autonomy.

The legislation has been widely denounced in the West since it was imposed on the former British colony on Tuesday (June 30).

"We stand for rules and obligations," Prime Minister Boris Johnson told Parliament.

"And we think that is the scientific basis for our international relations and the enactment, and deposition of this national security law constitutes a clear and serious breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration."

Johnson said London had warned Beijing that it would introduce a new route for those with British National Overseas status to enter the UK, granting them the right to live and work in Britain and then to apply for citizenship.

"And that is precisely what we will do now," Johnson said.

Britain's new offer applies to an estimated three million Hong Kongers but Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab refused to be drawn about how many would take up the offer.

Hong Kong was under UK jurisdiction until Britain handed it to China in 1997 with a guarantee that Beijing would preserve the city's judicial and legislative autonomy for 50 years.

But critics say the new security law, passed by Beijing's rubber-stamp Parliament this week, tests the limits of a 'One Country, Two Systems' deal that formally signed into international law in 1984.

Raab said Hong Kongers with BNO status and their dependents would be offered the right to work or study in Britain for five years. They would then have the right to apply for settled status and then possible citizenship.

**-AFP**

## Trending News

**Ethiopia:** Police say two days of protests have left 81 dead, after the murder of a popular singer from the country's largest ethnic group stoked tensions that threaten to derail the country's democratic transition.

**USA:** The country records more than 44,000 new coronavirus cases, a new record one-day increase as it struggles with the pandemic, while concerns mount over Donald Trump's handling of the crisis.

- A study reveals the coronavirus pandemic claimed at least 122,000 more lives than would be expected

in a normal year, for a rise of 18%.

-New York City lawmakers approve a disputed annual budget that purports to slash \$1 billion from the NYPD as calls by anti-racism protesters to defund law enforcement sweep the country.

**France:** The country suspends its participation in a NATO Mediterranean maritime security operation owing to the behaviour of Turkey, in a new escalation of a growing dispute between the two alliance allies.

**Palestine:** The Palestinian Authority announces a five-day lockdown

across the West Bank after total confirmed coronavirus infections in the territory more than doubled following the easing of previous restrictions.

**Italy:** Public officials in the central commune of Arezzo call for better surveillance of the feline population after a housecat contracted a rare rabies-like virus and began biting its owners.

**Middle East:** The World Health Organization warns the Middle East faces a "critical threshold" amid a relaxation of coronavirus measures,

following a surge in cases in the region.

**Taiwan:** The government announces it is opening representative offices with the breakaway state of Somaliland, warming ties between two de facto sovereign territories that are denied widespread international recognition.

**Myanmar:** The election commission announces the country will hold its next general election on November 8, in a test for the country's fledgling democratic government led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

### Quote for Today

The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up.

**-Mark Twain**

### Word for Today

**Staycation** [steykeyshuhn] *-noun* - a vacation spent at home or near home, doing enjoyable activities or visiting local attractions

### Today in History

**1990** - 1,426 pilgrims are trampled to death after a panic in a tunnel in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

### Today is..

#### I Forgot Day

An opportunity to get a jump on all the apologizing you'll have to do for the year, and make up for things already forgotten



# HOT TOPICS

By Ben Simon

## Palestinians rally as global opposition to Israeli annexation grows

**JERUSALE** - Thousands of Palestinians protested in Gaza yesterday (July 1) against Israel's West Bank annexation plans, as premier Benjamin Netanyahu held off an announcement on the controversial project and international opposition stiffened.

Netanyahu's centre-right coalition government had set July 1 as the date from which it could begin implementing US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace proposal. With no announcement currently scheduled on Israel's self-imposed kick-off date, opponents of the plan - notably Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza -- were mobilizing.

Several thousand brandished Palestinian flags and placards condemning Trump at a rally in Gaza City, while demonstrations were building in the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Jericho.

"The resistance must be revived," Gaza protester Ra-feeqInaiah told AFP. "Israel is afraid of force."

The Trump plan, unveiled in January, offered a path for Israel to annex territory and Jewish West Bank settlements, communities considered illegal under international law. Netanyahu has voiced enthusiastic support for the Trump plan - which has been roundly rejected by the Palestinians - but the right-wing premier has not revealed his intentions for enacting the US proposals. Hamas, the Islamist group that controls Gaza, launched some 20 test rockets from the coastal Palestinian enclave into the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday, a move aimed at dissuading Israel from moving forward, Hamas sources told AFP.

Hamas, which has fought three wars with Israel since 2008, says that Israeli annexations in the West Bank, which borders Jordan, would be a "declaration of war".

The Ramallah-based Palestinians Authority has said it is willing to renew long-stalled talks with Israel -- but not on terms outlined by Trump.

While the US has offered tacit support for immediate annexation, most of the international community is vocally opposed to the project.

Writing in Israel's Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper on Wednesday, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that although he was a "passionate defender of Israel," he viewed annexation as "contrary to Israel's own long-term interests."

"Annexation would represent a violation of international law," he said. In a rare criticism of Israel by Australia, the latter's foreign ministry issued a statement Wednesday warning against "unilateral annexation or change in status of territory on the West Bank".

France, Germany along with several other European states and the United Nations all oppose annexation, as do Gulf Arab states, with which Israel has increasingly sought warmer ties.

Jordan, one of only two Arab nations that has diplomatic ties with Israel, has warned that annexation could trigger a "massive conflict" and has not ruled out reviewing its 1994 peace treaty with the Jewish state.

Israel's defence minister and alternate prime minister Benny Gantz has said annexation must wait until the coronavirus crisis has been contained, amid a sharp spike in new Israeli and Palestinian cases.

Gantz is due to take over as prime minister in November 2021 under the terms of a coalition deal.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem following the 1967 Six Day War and then the Golan Heights on the Syrian border in 1981, in moves never recognized by most of the international community.

While some settlers have urged Netanyahu to take similar action in the West Bank, other settlers oppose the Trump plan, as it envisions the creation of a Palestinian state across roughly 70 percent of the West Bank.

"Trump's plan is to establish a Palestinian state in the land of Israel while leaving the Jews with little crumbs," Daniela Weiss, a settler movement leader, told AFP.

"This thing will not happen. We will not eat this bait. We will not fall into this trap."

Despite mounting headlines against implementing the Trump plan, experts have stressed that Netanyahu may still move forward in the coming days, noting that he is keenly watching the US presidential election and may be eager to act if he fears the president will not win a second term.

Presumptive US Democratic party nominee Joe Biden is opposed to any unilateral annexations by Israel.

-Agence France-Presse

## US buys nearly all stocks of coronavirus drug remdesivir

**WASHINGTON** - The United States has bought nearly all the available global supplies for the next three months of anti-viral drug remdesivir, one of two drugs that have proven to be effective against COVID-19.

The US Department of Health Services (HHS) announced on Monday (June 29) it had secured more than 500,000 treatment courses of remdesivir from drug maker Gilead Sciences for US hospitals until September. The stocks make up 100% of Gilead's projected production for July and 90% each for August and September.

"President [Donald] Trump has struck an amazing deal to ensure Americans have access to the first authorised therapeutic for COVID-19," HHS Secretary Alex Azar said in a statement.

"To the extent possible, we want to ensure that any American patient who needs remdesivir can get it."

Remdesivir, which is administered intravenously in hospital, is the first drug to show improvement in COVID-19 patients in formal clinical trials, and new information about its efficacy is being closely watched around the world, as nations battle the coronavirus pandemic. In May, US regulators allowed the emergency use of the experimental drug that appears to help some patients recover faster.

The drug has received full approval by Japanese health regulators. US approval requires a time-consuming Food and Drug Administration review, but Emergency Use Authorizations can be used in a health crisis when other options are not available.

There are currently no US approvals for treatments or vaccines for the new coronavirus that has infected more than 10 million people and killed nearly 500,000 worldwide, including more than 127,000 deaths in the US. Dozens of companies are working on a variety of treatment and vaccine approaches.

Remdesivir, which previously failed as a treatment for Ebola, is designed to disable the mechanism by which certain viruses, including the new coronavirus, make copies of themselves and potentially overwhelm their host's immune system.

On Monday, Gilead said it would price remdesivir at \$2,340 per patient in the US and other wealthier nations. In 127 poor or middle-income countries, Gilead is allowing generic makers to supply the drug.

-Al Jazeera/Agencies



-DALE DE LA REY / AFP

By Scott Murdoch, Yanni Chow

## Hong Kong police arrest nearly 200 in first protest under new security law

**HONG KONG** - Hong Kong police fired water cannon and tear gas and arrested nearly 200 people yesterday (July 1) as protesters took to the streets in defiance of sweeping security legislation introduced by China that critics say is aimed at snuffing out dissent.

Beijing unveiled the details of the much-anticipated law late on Tuesday after weeks of uncertainty, pushing China's freest city and one of the world's most glittering financial hubs onto a more authoritarian path.

As thousands of protesters gathered downtown for an annual rally marking the anniversary of the former British colony's handover to China in 1997, riot police used pepper spray and fired pellets as they made arrests after crowds spilled into the streets chanting "resist till the end" and "Hong Kong independence."

"I'm scared of going to jail but for justice I have to come out today, I have to stand up," said one 35-year-old man who gave his name as Seth.

The new law will punish crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces with up to life in prison, will see mainland security agencies in Hong Kong for the first time and allow for extradition to the mainland for trial.

China's Parliament adopted it in response to protests last year triggered by fears that Beijing was stifling the city's freedoms, guaranteed by a "one country, two systems" formula agreed when it returned to Chinese rule.

Earlier yesterday, police cited the law for the first time in confronting protesters.

"You are displaying flags or banners/chanting slogans/or conducting yourselves with an intent such as secession or subversion, which may constitute

offences under the ... national security law," police said in a message displayed on a purple banner.

Authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong have repeatedly said the legislation is aimed at a few "troublemakers" and will not affect rights and freedoms, nor investor interests.

But critics fear it is aimed ending the pro-democracy opposition and will crush the freedoms that are seen as key to Hong Kong's success as a financial centre.

The United States and its Asian and Western allies have criticized the legislation.

Police fired water cannon to try to disperse the protesters and said they had made more than 180 arrests for illegal assembly and other offences, with some involving violations of the new law.

A game of cat-and-mouse reminiscent of last year's often violent demonstrations followed, with protesters blocking roads before running away from riot police charging with batons, only to re-emerge elsewhere.

Police posted pictures on Twitter of an officer with a bleeding arm saying he was stabbed by "rioters holding sharp objects." The suspects fled while bystanders offered no help, police said.

On July 1 last year, hundreds of protesters stormed and vandalised the city's legislature to protest against a bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China.

Those protests evolved into calls for greater democracy, paralysing parts of the city and paving the way for Beijing's new law.

In Beijing, Zhang Xiaoming, executive deputy director of Beijing's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, told reporters suspects arrested by a new Beijing-run security office could be tried on the

mainland. He said the new office abided by Chinese law and that Hong Kong's legal system could not be expected to implement the laws of the mainland. Article 55 of the law states that Beijing's security office in Hong Kong could exercise jurisdiction over "complex" or "serious" cases.

"The law is a birthday gift to (Hong Kong) and will show its precious value in the future," Zhang said, adding the law would not be applied retroactively.

Speaking at a flag-raising ceremony to mark the handover anniversary, the city's Beijing-backed leader, Carrie Lam, said the law was the most important development since the city's return to Chinese rule.

"It is also an inevitable and prompt decision to restore stability," Lam said at the harbour-front venue where 23 years ago the last colonial governor, Chris Patten, a staunch critic of the security law, tearfully handed back Hong Kong to Chinese rule.

Some pro-Beijing officials and political commentators say the law is aimed at sealing Hong Kong's "second return" to the motherland after the first failed to bring residents to heel.

Luo Huining, the head of Beijing's top representative office in Hong Kong, said at the ceremony the law was a "common aspiration" of Hong Kong citizens.

Some pro-democracy activists gave up membership of their groups just before the law came into force into force at 11:00 p.m. (1500 GMT) on Tuesday, though they called for the campaign to go on from abroad.

"I saw this morning there are celebrations for Hong Kong's handover, but to me it is a funeral, a funeral for 'one country two systems'," said pro-democracy lawmaker Kwok Ka-ki.

-Agencies

By Richard Pérez Peña, Lara Jakes and Farnaz Fassihi

## No takers

### US appeal for indefinite arms embargo of Iran falls flat

**NEW YORK** - Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on Tuesday (June 30) for an arms embargo on Iran to be extended indefinitely, but his appeal fell flat at the United Nations, where Russia and China rejected it outright and close allies of the United States were ambivalent.

The embargo, which is set to expire on October 18, stems from the 2015 deal to curb Iran's nuclear program. President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2018, and Iran has exceeded the accord's limits on uranium enrichment since then, part of a steady escalation of tensions that have at times pushed the two countries dangerously close to war. The American bid is all but

certain to fail in the UN Security Council; it might not even collect enough support to be put to a vote, diplomats said. The Trump administration has threatened that if the embargo is not extended, the United States will try to invoke a 'snapback' provision of the 2015 deal to re-impose former UN sanctions on Iran -- a move other nations said would be unwise and legally invalid.

Representatives of Britain, France and Germany voiced unease at both the expiration of the embargo and the US approach, particularly the snapback, which they flatly opposed.

The European powers said they hoped to find some way to limit Iranian access to arms through a compromise

negotiated in the framework of the 2015 agreement, not an action imposed by the Security Council.

The arms embargo applies to Iran importing or exporting most kinds of weapons, including aircraft and tanks. Some limits on missile and nuclear technology will remain in place for a few more years.

The resistance to Pompeo's call -- coming not only from only rivals like China and Russia, but also from key allies -- illustrates the growing isolation and declining influence of the United States, analysts said, even in dealing with an Iran that members see as a rogue nation destabilizing the region.

-New York Times

## No big deal

### China downplays potential new swine flu pandemic

**BEIJING** - China yesterday (July 1) played down the threat of a new swine flu strain with pandemic potential that researchers discovered in pigs, saying the study is "not representative."

The deadly COVID-19 pandemic, which has now infected more than 10 million people worldwide, first emerged in China and is thought to have originated in bats and jumped to humans through an unknown intermediary animal. The new swine flu strain found in China, according to the study published Monday (June 29) in the US science journal PNAS, had "all the essential hallmarks" to infect humans and raised fears over another potential pandemic. But China's foreign ministry moved to downplay fears yesterday.

"The G4 virus mentioned in the relevant report is a subtype of the H1N1 virus," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said in a routine briefing.

"Experts have concluded that the sample size of the report is small and not representative."

Zhao added that "relevant departments and experts" will continue to step up monitoring of the disease, send warnings and handle it in a timely manner. The new G4 swine flu strain is genetically descended from the H1N1 strain that caused a pandemic in 2009, according to the study, which was authored by scientists at Chinese universities and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

G4 was observed to be highly infectious, they said, replicating in human cells and causing more serious symptoms in ferrets than other viruses.

Researchers took 30,000 nasal swabs from slaughterhouse pigs in 10 Chinese provinces, allowing them to isolate 179 swine flu viruses. According to the study, 10.4% of pig slaughterhouse workers tested had already been infected.

So far, there has been no evidence of human-to-human transmission. China did not elaborate further on how many had been infected by G4.

-AFP

-Agence France-Presse

By Javier C. Hernández

## Harsh penalties, vaguely defined crimes

### Hong Kong's security law explained

**HONG KONG** - The sweeping new national security law that China imposed on Hong Kong, aimed at stamping out opposition to the ruling Communist Party in the former British colony, is as "devastating" as some critics feared, a human-rights activist said yesterday (July 1).

Conceived in secrecy and passed Tuesday (June 30) without serious public input, the law, which includes 66 articles and more than 7,000 words, sets up a vast security apparatus in Hong Kong and gives Beijing broad powers to crack down on a variety of political crimes, including separatism and collusion.

It is likely to usher in a new era for Hong Kong, experts say, in which civil liberties are tightly constrained and loyalty to the party is paramount. "All in all, this is a takeover of Hong Kong," said Jerome A. Cohen, a New York University law professor who specializes in the Chinese legal system.

Here's a guide to the new rules:

### The law targets protesters with harsh penalties, including life imprisonment

The security law takes direct aim at the spirited anti-government protests that have convulsed Hong Kong over the past year, prescribing harsh penalties for the tactics commonly used by demonstrators.

As they led a months-long campaign last year to resist what they called Beijing's encroachment on Hong Kong's civil liberties, protesters worked to disrupt the city's reputation for efficiency and orderliness. Some groups attacked police stations, vandalized shops and restaurants and briefly paralyzed the airport. Under the new law, damaging government buildings would be considered an act of subversion punishable by life imprisonment in "grave" cases. Sabotaging transport would be deemed a terrorist activity punishable by life in prison if it harms other people or causes significant damage to public or private property.

The four major offences in the law -- separatism, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign countries -- are ambiguously worded and give the authorities extensive power to target activists who criticize the party, activists say.

"The law is devastating in that it appears to have no bounds," said Sophie Richardson, the China director at Human Rights Watch. "Hong Kong activists, accustomed to operating in mostly rights-respecting environment, now face a frightening void."

### Beijing now has broad authority to intervene in Hong Kong's legal system

Hong Kong's residents have long cherished the city's independent judiciary, a legacy of British colonial rule that stood in stark contrast to the secretive, party-controlled courts in mainland China.

Under the security law, however, Beijing has given itself wide latitude to interfere in Hong Kong's legal affairs. The legislation will install in Hong Kong a formidable network of security forces controlled by Beijing, including a national security agency, a national security committee and a special prosecutorial office.

Under the legislation, the central government in Beijing can intervene in national security cases, especially during crises or if a case is deemed "complex." The law says defendants in important cases could stand trial before courts in mainland China, where convictions are usually assured and penalties are often harsh. Trials involving state secrets could be closed to the news media and the public. The law could bring to Hong Kong many harsh legal practices common in mainland China, experts said. Broadly, the law says that the rights of suspects and defendants in national security cases should be respected. But apart from a presumption of innocence and the right to defend oneself, it does not offer much clarity on those protections, leaving open the danger that some of the harsh, unaccountable practices common on the mainland could spread to Hong Kong.

"As a national security suspect, you can be locked up for as long as six months incommunicado, subject to torture, coerced confession, no access to counsel or family or friends, before the police decide whether to process you for a crime," said Cohen, the law professor, speaking about practices common in mainland China.

### The law sends a warning to the US and other countries

Beijing has repeatedly sought to portray the unrest in Hong Kong as the work of foreign countries, especially the United States, accusing them of taking part in a plot to sow chaos in China and topple the Communist Party. Chinese officials have spread unfounded conspiracy theories suggesting that Western countries are funding and directing the activists. Several parts of the security legislation take aim at the perceived role of foreigners in political activism in Hong Kong.

The new rules apply even to those who are not residents of Hong Kong, suggesting that foreigners who support independence for Hong Kong or call for imposing sanctions on the Chinese government could be prosecuted upon entering Hong Kong or mainland China. The law also states that national security officials in Hong Kong will "take necessary measures to strengthen the management" of foreign nongovernmental organizations and news outlets in the territory. And, the legislation does not offer specifics.

The legislation seems to be aimed at silencing criticism of the party's policies in Hong Kong among rights activists, journalists and government officials outside China, experts said.

"The law's broad extraterritorial scope could well have a chilling effect on overseas NGOs, limiting their ability to partner with Hong Kong groups on sensitive issues like human rights and political reform," said Thomas E. Kellogg, executive director of the Centre for Asian Law at Georgetown University. Kellogg said that more restrictions on nongovernmental groups working on issues like human rights, the rule of law and the democratic development in Hong Kong were likely to emerge in the coming months.

The provisions targeting foreigners will most likely worsen tensions between China and the United States, with relations already at their lowest point in decades. The Trump administration has promised a series of punishments in retaliation for the national security legislation, including visa restrictions and limits on exporting defence technology.

-New York Times



# GLOCAL

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# AG approves health guidelines for COVID-coloured polling

**COLOMBO** – Attorney General (AG) Dapula de Livera has approved regulations under which the parliamentary election will be held in August, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coordinating Officer to the AG State Counsel Nishara Jayaratne said the Quarantine Health Regulations, which were forwarded by the Ministry of Health, were

approved yesterday (July 1). The general election 2020 is scheduled to be held on August 5, with postal voting to be held from July 13 to 16.

A total of 7452 candidates will be contesting the elections, with 3652 candidates contesting from recognized political parties and 3800 representing independent groups.

A total of 313 independent groups are set

to contest the elections this year. Among the 7452 candidates, 196 individuals will be elected to Parliament, while the remaining 29 seats will be filled through the National List.

The National Election Commission (NEC) has announced the official polling cards for the election will be handed over to the Department of Posts from July 11 to 13, while

the distribution of polling cards will be completed by July 29. Chairman, NEC, Mahinda Deshapriya, said the counting of ballot papers will commence at 8:00 a.m. on August 6, and that the Commission hopes to announce the first results at around 4:00 p.m. the same day, and the final results by 8.00 p.m.

**CG/ENCL**



- LAKRUWAN WANNIARACHCHI / AFP

Upul Tharanga, a member of the 2011 Sri Lanka World Cup squad, leaves the Special Investigation Unit in Colombo yesterday (July 1). Tharanga became the first player to be grilled by detectives in a probe investigating claims that the 2011 Cricket World Cup final was fixed. Sri Lanka's chief cricket selector for the 2011 cricket World Cup, Aravinda de Silva, was grilled for six hours on Tuesday (June 30)

## Woman arrested with grenades and ammunition

**Said to be connected to largest haul recovered from underworld gang**

**COLOMBO** – A woman from Pitipana, Homagama, said to be connected to the suspect arrested with the largest haul of fire arms to be recovered from an underworld gang in Sri Lanka earlier this week, was taken into custody with a cache of weapons yesterday (July1). The arrest followed a raid by the Special Task Force (STF) Attached to the Sri Jayawardenapura Police, who also seized seven hand grenades, one repeater shotgun and several rounds for ammunition.

According to police sources, the raid had been carried out based on information from

the National Intelligence Unit that the woman was involved with the suspect arrested with a stock of weapons, including 12 T-56 guns, in Homagama on Monday (June 29).

The weapons are said to belong to an underworld gang connected to a convicted drug lord identified as 'Gagana.' The STF had carried out Monday's raid on a tip off that a stock of weapons belonging to 'Gagana' had been stashed at the suspect's house in Homagama. The suspect was later identified as an associate of 'Gagana.'

**-ENCL**

## Import controls extended indefinitely amid money printing

**COLOMBO**– Sri Lanka has extended indefinitely the sweeping import controls and licence regime introduced for three months from May 22, after unprecedented money printing triggered foreign exchange shortages.

Excess liquidity in money markets was Rs 88 billion (representing the potential loss of about US\$ 470 million to keep the exchange rate stable when credit picks up or foreign loans are repaid) on May 22 when the regulations were gazetted.

By June 26, excess liquidity had risen to Rs 209 billion, which will require about US\$ 1.1 billion in reserves to mop up, while potentially also generating inflation if credit picks up.

Sri Lanka is also giving central bank finance (printed money) to boost credit. The money is printed despite the country having to repay foreign loans.

The government introduced sweeping import controls not seen since the 1970s, when Sri Lanka closed the entire economy, using provisions of an import and export control law of 1969.

The current regulations are slapped using the same law.

The controls which were originally set to expire in three months, will now be in place "until further notice," the new rules said.

The new rules introduced a series of regulations for exporters who need to import, allowing some items to be imported, suspending some and allowing some others under a licence regime.

Under the new regulations, freezing equipment (chest type freezer), tankers and bowsers, have been taken off a temporarily suspended list, as are washing machines over 10 kilograms and parts for the machines. Some spare parts for televisions, video displays and knocked down forms have also been allowed. Knocked down items typically bring less revenue to the government, but will benefit selected businesses.

Some computer and electronic parts including chips, and diodes, solar cells and monitors, which were previously allowed in under credit have been removed from the list. Carbon brushes have also been removed.

Crude coconut oil, virgin coconut oil and jute sacks for packaging have also been removed, along with a series of vehicle parts for cars and motor cycles from the credit list.

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## Foreign Secretary says

## Sri Lanka needs to rethink how it should train and manage migrant workers

**COLOMBO** – The COVID-19 induced crisis in migrant labour should prompt a re-think in how Sri Lanka should train and manage its overseas workers, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Relations, Ravinatha Aryasinha told a group of professionals, noting that the present crisis in foreign labour "has been an eye-opener" in many respects.

Tens of thousands of migrant Sri Lankan workers are facing a crisis in several countries, particularly the Middle-East, and are seeking to return.

Aryasinha, in a speech to the Organization of Professional Associations over the weekend, observed that despite its immediate gloom, the present situation has been an eye opener in many respects that could help correct structural, procedural and human interface incongruities in Sri Lanka's labour migration.

It also presents an opportunity for Sri Lanka to re-orient foreign employment in a post-COVID-19 world, sensitive to the ground realities in both Sri Lanka and the migrant labour receiving countries, he said, adding, 'So that the future footprint of Foreign Employment Sri Lanka will provide the world – though probably smaller, could be smarter and more sustainable.'

Aryasinha also revealed that the COVID-19 crisis had exposed the significant number of Sri Lankan migrant workers abroad who are undocumented/irregular, and as a result are ineligible to avail medical and other benefits in their host

countries. They are also vulnerable to deportation if identified, he said, noting that many of them are not registering with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) was a matter of concern. He urged all migrant workers to register with the SLBFE so they could enjoy the benefits of an expanded social safety net, as successfully practiced by migrant workers in countries like the Philippines, where the percentage of registered migrant workers is 96.8%.

He said, even for those who are legal, a consequence of COVID-19 has been the shrinking of the employment market, particularly with the increasing cases of unemployment, loss of contracts, non-extension of work permits and halting of temporary freelance work, which have left many of them largely destitute.

He also noted that this could lead to a serious shortfall in the numbers of migrant workers who will leave for work this year and in turn a drop in worker remittances. In 2019, migrant worker's remittances to foreign exchange earnings was 25.5%, while its contribution to Sri Lanka's GDP was approximately 8%.

Aryasinha said, the present situation could help in building more forward looking and resilient policies and strategies that can ensure 'sustainable and just economies.' He also noted that Sri Lanka, which has had the opportunity to design and provide input on certain crucial regional modalities within the

Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue – could together with the ILO and IOM, also play a greater role in the post-COVID scenario for the benefit of the migrant workers, as well as the sending and receiving countries. This would include;

- ensuring the outward flow of a better trained and skilled migrant worker, one who will while able to earn more, is less likely to face the vulnerabilities presently encountered by the average Sri Lankan migrant worker, particularly the unskilled workers,
- combine market research platforms to generate vocational training programs that will serve future job markets and economic demands in countries post Covid-19, and recalibrate to inspire a work force that meets that demand,
- re-formulate our education systems, and re-orient students to be a rich human resource pool for future labour markets,
- expedite action in enhancing cheaper, safer and faster modes of remittance flows,
- ensure that 'migrant health' becomes a cornerstone in the management of migrant populations.

Aryasinha said the recent crisis has helped break the silos and ensure better intra-governmental coordination in dealing with matters concerning migrant workers – both in Colombo, as well as in the destination countries.

**-ENCL**

## Magistrate orders police probe into how in-camera evidence by children was leaked to media

**COLOMBO** – The Fort Magistrate has ordered an investigation into how evidence given to him in-camera by two children last week made its way into the following day's newspapers.

Magistrate Ranga Dissanayake yesterday (July 1) ordered the Deputy Inspector General of the Western Province to investigate the incident and report to him.

Dissanayake told the court that only he and the Court Mudliyar were present in his chambers when the children gave evidence.

The Magistrate said he had locked up the evidence given by the children in the court locker after recording it.

The case being heard is into the bombing of the Cinnamon Grand Hotel in Colombo during the Easter Sunday attacks and the children's testimony pertains to the arrest of leading lawyer Hejaaz Hisbullah. Police allege Hejaaz aided and abetted the suicide

bombers. The children in question are witnesses brought forth by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and reportedly gave evidence to support their case that Hejaaz was a leading member of an Islamic school where young boys were radicalized.

Hejaaz is being held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and is yet to be produced before a Magistrate.

Because he is being held under the draconian PTA, the Magistrate has no power to order that he be produced before him.

Nawarathna Bandara PC, appearing with Harshana Nanayakkara and Hafeel Farisz appeared for Hejaaz while IP Ranil Wimalasiri appeared for the CID.

Hejaaz has challenged his detention in a Fundamental Rights petition before the Supreme Court, which is coming up for hearing next week.

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## Sri Lanka's withdrawal from UN resolution

## Core Group reiterate 'profound disappointment'

**GENEVA** - Canada, Germany and the UK reiterated their "profound disappointment" over Sri Lanka's withdrawal of co-sponsorship from United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolutions promoting accountability, reconciliation and human rights.

Addressing the 44th Session of the UNHRC, the member states, alongside North Macedonia and Montenegro, stressed that any "accountability mechanism must have the confidence of those affected."

In a statement delivered by UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, the Core Group said, "Since March, Sri Lanka has been battling COVID-19, and has kept case numbers significantly lower than the regional average. However, as stated by the High Commissioner, extraordinary measures to tackle the pandemic should not be used to roll back human rights.

"We share the concerns of Sri Lankan human rights organizations over the targeting and marginalization of minority groups, the pardoning of Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake and promotion of others accused of serious violations during the conflict, and the militarization of a wide range of civilian functions and public initiatives."

The Group called on Sri Lanka to ensure that the country's democratic space remains open and accountable.

"We call for detentions and arrests to follow due process and be compliant with international norms and universal rights, for example in the case of lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, who has now been detained for almost three months without charge or presentation before the court. We call for an end to impunity for the violations and abuses of the past."

**-ENCL**

## Chiyo Kanda is WB's new country manager for SL

**COLOMBO** –The World Bank (WB) yesterday (July 1) announced the appointment of Chiyo Kanda as its new Country Manager for Sri Lanka, saying she will oversee a total portfolio of around \$2.3 billion and the development of a new country partnership framework.

Chiyo Kanda will be based in Colombo, the World Bank said in a statement, adding that Faris Hadad-Zervos will be taking up the position of Country Director for Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and based in Nepal. Hadad-Zervos succeeds. Idah Z. Pswarayi-Riddihough, who will be taking on a new World Bank assignment.

Kanda's appointment comes at a time when the Government of Sri Lanka is working to address both the immediate and longer-term health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

"Sri Lanka has managed to limit the spread of COVID-19 quite effectively so far. It is now critical to kick-start economic recovery and protect people's jobs and livelihoods," said Kanda, adding that her priority was to build on the strong partnership with the Sri Lankan government and its people to work together to prepare the next country partnership framework to support Sri

Lanka's development. A Japanese national, Kanda joined the World Bank in 1994 as a Young Professional and has since held various positions as Economist and Senior Economist for Africa, Senior Operations Officer in Tanzania and Operations & Portfolio Manager in the Philippines. Her most recent assignment was as Manager in the Operations Policy & Country Services Vice Presidency's results unit. Kanda said she looked forward to working closely with all development partners, including the private sector and civil society groups, to promote sustainable growth and shared prosperity.

The World Bank is supporting the government's COVID-19 response through a \$215 million COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project to help prevent, detect, and respond to the pandemic and to strengthen its public health system. Additional financing of \$87.24 million has also been provided through the same project, to boost the country's preparedness as it resumes economic activities. There are 20 projects in the World Bank portfolio in Sri Lanka amounting to \$2.3 billion in a variety of sectors including transport, urban, water, education and health.

**-ENCL**

## Fujian firm joins Hambantota port development

**COLOMBO**– China's CMPorts said a Fujian-based logistics group will take an indirect stake to join the development of the Hambantota port, in a move that will bring in new industries from the Chinese province to Sri Lanka and reduce its debt. Fujian Provincial Communication Transportation Group Co., Ltd (FJCT), will take a 23% stake in Gainpro Resources Limited, British Virgin Islands Company that holds CM Ports' 85% stake of Hambantota Port International Group, the operating company of the port.

"FJCT will take this cooperation as an opportunity to deepen the cooperation between Hambantota port and Fujian ports as well as shipping enterprises," Li Xinghu, Chairman of FJCT said in a statement.

'At the same time, FJCT will also strive to attract and encourage Fujian enterprises to participate in the construction of Hambantota port, and strive to make Hambantota Port a Homebase for Fujian enterprises to enter the South Asia and overseas markets." FJCT will pay US\$ 268 million to take a 23.52% stake in Gainpro Resources through a special purpose vehicle, Fujian Transportation Maritime Silk Road Investment and Management Co. Limited (Fujian TMSR) and appoint directors to HIPG.

The money will be used to reduce CM Port debt. Gainpro has a US\$ 976 million shareholder loan from the parent company. CMPorts paid Sri Lanka US\$ 976 million to take an 85% stake in HIPG. In 2019, Hambantota operations had lost US\$ 20.1 million, and in 2018, US\$ 21.39 million. CMPorts chairman Deng Renjie said FJCT and China Merchants groups had had a long history of collaboration and he expected the new partnership to expand co-operation in port business and lead to the speeding up of industries into the industrial park of Hambantota port.

Hambantota has been increasing its vehicle transshipment and is developing bunkering. In 2019 it had handled 410,000 vehicles.

Sri Lanka sold a stake in Hambantota port to CM Ports as the state-run Sri Lanka Ports Authority could not develop enough business to repay loans taken to build the port.

**-economynext.com**

## By Amal Jayasinghe

## Sri Lanka questions World Cup opener in fixing probe

**COLOMBO** - Sri Lanka opener Upul Tharanga yesterday (July 1) became the first player to be grilled by detectives in a probe investigating claims that the 2011 Cricket World Cup final was fixed.

The 35-year-old batsman and wicketkeeper was questioned for two hours by the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) examining the conduct of the final, which Sri Lanka lost to India. "They asked a few questions in connection with the ongoing investigation. I gave my statement," Tharanga told reporters without giving further details. Tharanga, who scored two runs off 20 deliveries in the match at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, was called in after investigators quizzed chief selector Aravinda de Silva for nearly six hours on Tuesday (June 30).

Police said they will next interview Kumar Sangakkara, the captain of the losing side and the current president of the Marylebone Cricket Club in London, who was asked to report to the SIU today (2). There was no immediate comment from the 42-year-old, who last month said the allegations should be referred to the International Cricket Council (ICC). The Sri Lankan probe was launched after the then-sports minister claimed that Sri Lanka threw the April 2011 match. "I feel I can talk about it now," Mahindananda Aluthgamage told a local TV network last month. "I am not connecting players, but some sections were involved." Sri Lanka bat first and scored 274-6 off 50 overs. They appeared in a commanding position when Indian superstar Sachin Tendulkar was out for 18. But India turned the game around dramatically, thanks in part to poor fielding and bowling by Sri Lanka, who were led by Kumar Sangakkara.

India won the final by six wickets. Sangakkara and his deputy Mahela Jayawardena quit their positions in the team after the stunning defeat.

The toss of the final was also controversial as it was done twice. Match referee Jeff Crowe apparently did not hear "heads" called by Sangakkara and asked Indian skipper M. S. Dhoni to toss again. Sangakkara won the toss and elected to bat, a decision that was criticised in local media because the Sri Lankans were considered to be better at chasing at the time. Sri Lankan cricket has been plagued by several corruption scandals, including claims of match-fixing ahead of a 2018 Test against England. Last month the local cricket board said the ICC was investigating three unnamed ex-players over corruption claims.

Match-fixing was made a criminal offence in November. Offenders face fines of up to 100 million rupees (\$555,000) and up to 10 years' jail.

**-AFP**

## Veteran author Sybil

## Wettasinghe, dies aged 93

**COLOMBO** - Veteran children's author, Kala Keerthi Sybil Wettasinghe passed away yesterday (July 1) while receiving treatment at the Sri Jayawardenepura Hospital. She was 93. Family sources said final rites will be conducted at 3:00 p.m. on Friday (3).

Born in 1927, Wettasinghe spent the first six years of her childhood in Gintota, Galle, later moving to Colombo to Study at Holy Family Convent in Bambalapitiya. She was involved in creative writing for leading newspapers and magazines since the age of 15. In 1952, she produced a narrative called 'Kuda Hora' for the children's page of a newspaper; and eventually developed it into a book that was critically acclaimed both locally and internationally. The book was translated into seven languages including English, Chinese, and Japanese.

Inspired by the success of 'Kuda Hora', Wettasinghe applied herself to writing as well as illustrating and has published over 200 children's books over the course of her career. The last book released by Wettasinghe, the 'Wonder Crystal' achieved a world record for the most number of alternate endings. The book was an initiative by Munchee and was launched with the objective of encouraging children to use their imagination and explore their creativity and thus complete the story by contributing through their writings, drawings and poetry.

**-ENCL**

## Pre-schools, Grades 1, 2 to reopen in August

**COLOMBO** - Pre-schools, and Grades 1 and 2 in all schools will reopen in August, the Ministry of Education announced yesterday (July 1), deferring an earlier decisions to re-open in early July. In a press release issued yesterday, the ministry said all pre-schools and Grades 1 and 2 will reopen from August 10. The release also noted all schools and pre-schools should strictly adhere to coronavirus prevention guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health.

Separately, Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Director General of Health announced that permission is granted to re-open theatres for stage plays and other concerts from July 15, subject to health restrictions, specifically 50% audience capacity per show.

A media statement said strict adherence to health guidelines prescribed for the protection against Covid-19 virus is compulsory during all shows.

**-ENCL**

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# COMMENTARY

## Mahinda Rajapaksa’s call

Don’t be distracted by minor issues; help defeat foreign conspiracies

**COLOMBO** - Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has urged the electorate not to be distracted by “politically unimportant” matters and to instead focus on the big picture and vote for a party that has a proven track record of safeguarding the country from foreign conspiracies.

“If we allow ourselves to be distracted and forget the broader picture even for a moment, the consequences could be disastrous,” Rajapaksa said in a statement issued on Monday (June 29).

“If people cast their votes on the basis of various minor distractions, we will lose everything, our country, our nationhood, our religion, our culture and the future of unborn generations,” he added.

The minor distractions referred to by Rajapaksa include the allegedly extravagant funeral of former minister ArumugamThondaman amid a pandemic, the controversial statement made by former sports minister MahindanandaAluthgamage that the 2011 Cricket World Cup final was fixed, and most recently, remarks made by LTTE-militant-turned-politician VinayagamoorthyMuralitharan (alias Karuna Amman) allegedly bragging about killing thousands of Sri Lankan troops.

“Given the threats we are up against, we will be destroyed if we fail to distinguish between what is politically important and politically unimportant. Various things can be said about the question whether social distancing was observed in the proper manner at ArumugamThondaman’s funeral or whether someone had been guilty of fixing a cricket match back in 2011. However, these are not politically important matters,” Rajapaksa said.

“We saw the manner in which the yahapalana cabal made a hue and cry about a comment made by Karuna Amman to the effect that he had been responsible for the deaths of thousands of soldiers in attacks on army camps when he was in the LTTE. This shows how easy it is to obscure the broader picture by bringing other issues to the fore,” he said, recalling that it was Karuna who had formally identified LTTE leader VelupillaiPrabhakaran’s body at the end of the war in 2009.

The prime minister accused elements in what he called the Yahapalana camp, opposition parties that comprised or supported the previous administration, of supplying “lorry loads of weapons and gunny bags full of cash” to the LTTE in 1989.

“From the time Karuna Amman was murdering people, and after he had given up doing so, and right up to the present day, what has been right at the top of the yahapalana agenda has been the division of this country. Karuna may have given up murdering people, but the yahapalana cabal has not given up trying to divide the country. That is what we have to realize here,” he said.

In his statement, Rajapaksa highlighted a litany of alleged international conspiracies facilitated by the Yahapalana camp, including arresting and prosecuting Buddhist monks and war heroes on “trumped up charges,” attempts to demoralise and render ineffective the country’s military, and a systematic persecution of nationalist politicians.

Among other matters that came under his criticism were the establishment of the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), passing legislation to make provisions in the International Convention Against Enforced Disappearances applicable in Sri Lanka, passing an amendment to the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act and the pledge to bring in a new constitution.

“The situation that prevailed in this country following the assumption of power by the yahapalana government in 2015 was akin to having been taken over by a hostile foreign invading force,” he charged.

“If the Yahapalana cabal had won the 2019 presidential election, they would have implemented all this and finished off Sri Lanka. We need a very strong mandate at this election to conclusively defeat these conspiracies,” he added.

Reiterating that voters must always have the big picture in mind, Rajapaksa urged the people to consider who can best protect the country.

“The people should always ask themselves who can rule this country effectively, ensure economic development, eliminate terrorism and ensure the security of the nation? Who can safeguard democracy by holding elections on time? Who can build a Sri Lanka where future generations will be able to live freely and be proud of? I need not spell it out, every Sri Lankan knows the answer to those questions,” he said.

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-Debbie Hill/Pool via Reuters

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivers a statement overlooking the Israeli settlement of Har Homa, in Israeli-occupied West Bank on February 20, 2020

By Marwan Bishara

## Hubris: Israel’s endgame in Palestine

**US** President Donald Trump’s Middle East “peace plan” is clearer in the original Hebrew. The Israeli version is bold on annexation, bleak on peace and low on diplomatic humbug.

And thanks to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing politics, the “peace process” has been exposed for what it is - a colonization operation. This surreal process has long served as a cover up for deep Israeli entrenchment in the West Bank and Jerusalem, rendering civilian and military withdrawal improbable if not unthinkable for most Israelis.

Having secured Trump’s approval, Netanyahu will go forward with annexation despite warnings of an international backlash, the demise of the two-state solution, and the erosion of the “democratic Jewish state.”

Netanyahu will likely once again rebuff such warnings, relying on unconditional US support.

With Washington on its side, Israel has long acted with impunity. Its annexation of East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights are a case in point. International fretting and frowning eventually subsided after the Trump administration recognised these annexations.

Israel has long opposed the establishment of a truly sovereign Palestinian state in the occupied territories. The governing Likud party supports only limited autonomy for the Palestinians, or at best, half a state on half of the West Bank.

Regardless of annexation, Netanyahu knows all too well that Israel is not in reality a “democratic Jewish state”, not when a quarter of its population are not Jewish and mostly oppose its Zionist creed.

In fact, for the Palestinians, Israel is neither democratic, Jewish, nor a normal state. It is a colonial occupation, a garrison state, always at war, expanding its frontiers and deepening its domination of Palestine.

For these reasons, annexation is only a matter of when, not if, it will happen.

The more complicated question is, how and to what end?

To understand where Israel is going in the West Bank, which is home to 60% of all Palestinians living under occupation, look at its record in the Galilee where some 60 percent of all Palestinian citizens of Israel live.

The similarities between Israeli policies towards these two predominantly Palestinian regions are as disturbing as they are instructive.

In 1947, the UN Partition Plan allocated much of the Galilee to a future Palestinian state. After the Palestinians

rejected the ridiculous unenforceable plan and war broke out, Israel occupied the Galilee and imposed military rule for almost two decades with three goals in mind.

First, confiscate large swaths of Palestinian land, especially rich agricultural land belonging to Palestinian refugees, to settle Jews and eventually create a Jewish majority. Second, thwart the return of Palestinians to their homes and towns. And third, break up Palestinian contiguity to block Palestinian national unity and prevent a potential secession.

The plan worked. After Israel’s 1967 war and occupation, Israel carried out similar confiscations of Palestinian land to build Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem.

In both regions, Israel established three major Jewish centres in the south, middle and north to break up Palestinian contiguity of the newly occupied territories: Nazareth Illit, Karmiel and Ma’alot in the Galilee, Gush Etzion, Ma’alehAdumim and Ariel in the West Bank.

To solidify the enlarged Jewish presence in the Galilee and later in the occupied West Bank, Israel connected the Jewish settlements with bypass roads and outsourced regional development to networks of exclusively Jewish councils at the expense of Palestinian localities.

The newly erected apartheid system empowered new expansive and affluent Jewish settlements to the detriment of tightly controlled Palestinian peripheries in all the regions under its control.

After five decades of occupation, Israel has now decided the time has come to extend its sovereignty to the illegal Jewish settlements over a third of the West Bank territory.

Netanyahu reckons the Trump administration is offering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go for the kill.

He aims for a gradual annexation. He could start with annexing the three main settlement blocks followed by the areas adjacent to the Jordan River.

This will pave the way for overall permanent Israeli control over historical Palestine.

But Netanyahu will not stop there.

Hoping to overcome his reputation, indeed his legacy of corruption, he is re-inventing himself as a latter-day “King of Israel”, who fulfils the theological fantasies of the Israeli and American evangelical right for full Israeli control over Palestine.

In that way, Netanyahu aims to consolidate and annex dozens of smaller settlements deep inside the West Bank as Israel has done in the Galilee, ena-

bling Israel to keep its military in, the Palestinians down, and the refugees out.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government has signalled its willingness to compensate the Palestinians for the loss of their national rights, with money and autonomy - Gulf money and Israeli-controlled autonomy.

To do so, Israel and the US have been pressuring rich Arab and European states to help turn their “peace into prosperity”. They convened a conference in Bahrain especially for that purpose last year.

And they may attempt a similar regional initiative in the coming weeks to present the Palestinians with an ultimatum: acquiesce to their plan or face the consequences.

While Israel bets on weak Arab dictatorships to succumb to US pressure, the Palestinians share the Arab masses’ eagerness for freedom and rely on their sweeping rejection of Israel.

They overwhelmingly oppose the Trump-Netanyahu plans that facilitate Israel’s illegitimate control over their lives, rendering them powerless guests in their own homeland, utterly dependent on Israel’s goodwill.

They wish the international community would stop pleading with Israel over annexation and start punishing it for all its military transgressions and crimes in Palestine.

But if Israel goes ahead with annexation, the Palestinians will have no choice but to drop the goal of a mini-state on one-fifth of their homeland, and struggle for equal rights in the entirety of their homeland, seeking freedom from Israeli control and justice after decades of dispossession.

Contrary to the hopes of the Israeli right, the Palestinians will not be bribed or intimidated to pack and leave; they will remain steadfast in their homeland. If anything, it is the Israelis who seemingly are leaving.

According to Israel’s embassy in the US, 750,000-1 million Israelis live in the US alone. Thousands still are moving to Europe and seeking EU citizenship.

With an equal number of Jews and Palestinians living in very close proximity between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River, political and physical barriers will come down sooner or later, albeit after shedding much blood and tears in the process.

If Israel devours all of Palestine, it will be a matter of time before Israel becomes Palestine.

**-Marwan Bishara is the senior political analyst at Al Jazeera where this article was originally featured**

By P. K. Balachandran

## What’s driving the Baloch insurgency?

**Four** well-armed terrorists, believed to be from the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), were shot dead while attempting to storm the Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) on Monday (June 29). While legitimately claiming credit for foiling the nefarious attempt to disrupt an already fragile economy, Pakistani authorities, including Prime Minister Imran Khan, promptly pointed an accusing finger at an Indian intelligence agency.

But by doing so, they had precluded any consideration of the root cause of unrest, separatism and terrorism in Balochistan, which have plagued the province for decades, virtually from independence in 1947, when the Khanate of Kalat was controversially annexed by the newly established State of Pakistan without consulting the people of the Princely State. While the first revolt in 1948 was crushed quickly enough, the subsequent insurgencies were more difficult to deal with, even with the use of superior force.

The consistent failure of the Pakistani State to acknowledge and address the root causes has made the Balochistan insurgency the longest lasting one in Pakistan. Its impact in the coming years will have a huge impact on the economic and strategic situation in Pakistan because the Gwadar port, the end point of the multi-billion dollar China-funded and executed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is located in Balochistan. And CPEC is part of China’s flagship international project the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The fact that India has serious issues with the CPEC and BRI adds to Pakistan’s insecurity.

While interested outside forces might be fishing in troubled waters, the root cause of unrest in Balochistan lie deep in the step-motherly treatment meted out to it and the Baloch people over the last five decades. Wilful neglect of Balochistan by successive Pakistani governments has been stressed in all the reports of human rights organizations and writings by scholars, both within and outside Pakistan.

Tiffany Tanner, in her PhD thesis entitled: ‘Explaining the resilience of the Balochistan insurgency’ submitted to the University of Maine in 2019, notes that Balochistan is home to substantial energy and mineral reserves and meets 36% of Pakistan’s energy needs. But the royalties given to Balochistan are significantly less than those given to Punjab and Sindh, which, in 2009, received \$1.65 and \$2.35 per thousand cubic feet of gas supplied respectively, while Balochistan got only \$0.29. Also, only four out of 28 districts in Balochistan were able to avail of the gas.

Tanner quotes Dr. Kaiser Bengali and MahparaSadaqat to say that Balochistan’s share of Pakistan’s GDP from 1973 to 2000 had declined to 4.5 %, while contribution from Punjab had increased to 52.7%, Sindh to 31% and the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) 11.7%. By 2000 Balochistan’s share had decreased to 3.7%. However, it is important to note that Balochistan has only 5% of Pakistan’s population.

As regards per capita GDP, Tanner says Balochistan started off in 1973 with a higher average than Punjab and NWFP, but essentially stagnated by 2000 with only a marginal increase comparatively.

Another contention is over the Gwadar port, built by China as part of its BRI and the CPEC. The agreement with China for CPEC was signed in 2002 without taking the Balochis into confidence. The Balochis have never felt the project has benefited them.

According to Tanner the land used for the project was “sold off at superficially low rates for development under government land-grabbing schemes that exploited residents’ inability to provide official land-ownership documentation.”

Tanner notes that within close proximity of the Gwadar port, there is a ‘parallel town’ with elite amenities intended for settlers and tourists, blocked off by paramilitary checkpoints that deny entrance to locals. She also adds that within the city of Gwadar itself, there are signs of serious underdevelopment, and the port has brought more problems than success to the residents.

The Pakistan Stock Exchange was the target the BLA on Monday because, for the Baloch nationalists, it is a symbol of Chinese economic and financial power and domination. According to Ikram Sehgal, a leading Pakistani analyst, the Chinese secured management control after acquiring 40% of its shares in 2016. The shares are held by Shanghai Stock Exchange, Shenzhen Stock Exchange and China Financial Futures Exchange. Another 5% is held by a local company linked to the Chinese investment.

Monday’s attack on the KSE was not the first Baloch insurgent attack on a Chinese target. In 2018, the Chinese Consulate in Karachi was attacked.

Tanner observes that the presence of China in Balochistan, coupled with Pakistan’s critical need for Chinese investment, puts significant pressure on the Pakistani state to deal with the insurgency firmly. This internal security pressure elevates Pakistan’s threat perception vis-à-vis India, which opposes the BRI and CPEC. India feels that CPEC violates its sovereignty in certain crucial parts of the project like Gilgit-Baltistan.

Tanner quotes reports of human rights organizations and watchdogs like the Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and others from Pakistan itself, which say the security forces have often resorted to abductions and torture to quell the insurgency and dissent. These methods have only exacerbated the situation instead of ensuring lasting peace. Over the years, the base of the Baloch insurgency has shifted from the rural traditional power structure comprising tribal chiefs to the educated urban middle class. This has given a new kind of strength to the movement. The new insurgents use modern weapons and communication technologies.

Tanner points out that with the tribal chiefs losing their influence, tribalism or tribal rivalries are no longer weakening factors.

### About the Author

**P.K. Balachandran** is a senior Colombo-based journalist who, in the past two decades, has reported for The Hindustan Times, The New Indian Express and Economist

