



Bay of Bengal nations resolve to face calamities together

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — An umbrella organization of seven Bay of Bengal nations says its members must urgently leverage geographical advantage and other resources to address their post-pandemic vulnerabilities and collectively strengthen resilience to face future calamities. In a declaration on the last day of a three-day summit, the group said the members resolve to work together to combat poverty, natural disasters, climate change, pandemics, and transnational crime. They also resolved to work toward food and energy security and strengthen their connections to grow trade, investment, tourism, and technology and offset economic losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sri Lanka hosted the 5th summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Corporation in its national capital of Colombo.

India plans Sri Lanka power project after China's is shelved

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — India has signed an agreement to set up hybrid power projects on northern Sri Lankan islands in a deal seen as a strategic victory in its competition with China for influence in the Indian Ocean. India's external affairs minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who was visiting Colombo, witnessed the signing along with Sri Lankan foreign minister Gamini Peiris, the Indian embassy said. In December, China announced it was suspending its own plan to build power plants on three Sri Lankan islands due to security concerns. An Indian official said he couldn't confirm if the plants in the new agreement are to be built on the same islands earmarked for the Chinese project. The power source and other details about the projects weren't available. India considers Sri Lanka, just across the narrow Palk Strait off India's southeastern coast, to be within its sphere of influence. The island nation is in the middle of a key sea route connecting east and west and is important to China's ambitious "One Belt One Road" global infrastructure initiative. India and China are rivals for influence in the region and have border disputes that have flared in recent years.

Singapore hangs drug trafficker after resuming executions

SINGAPORE (AP) — A Singaporean man on death row for drug trafficking was hanged last month in the first execution in the city-state in more than two years, rights activists said. Singapore, which has harsh anti-drug laws, had halted executions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and last meted out capital punishment in November 2019. Abdul Kahar Othman, 68, was hanged, anti-death penalty activist Kirsten Han said. The execution occurred despite pleas from rights activists, including the U.N. Human Rights office, to commute Kahar's sentence to life imprisonment. Han and several others held a small vigil outside the prison for Kahar. Kahar, who came from a poor family and had struggled with drug addiction since he was a teenager, spent more time behind bars than as a free man, Han said. He was released from prison in 2005 after a decade of preventive detention. In 2013, Kahar was convicted of drug trafficking and sentenced to death two years later. Kahar's incarcerations without proper rehabilitation had made it difficult for him to walk new paths, Han said. Han, along with the U.N. and other rights groups, have expressed concerns that executions might be accelerated in the city-state after a two-year halt.

China tries to limit economic blow of Shanghai shutdown

BEIJING (AP) — As millions of Shanghai residents line up for coronavirus tests in the closed-down metropolis, authorities are promising tax cuts for shopkeepers and to keep its busy port functioning to limit disruptions to industry and trade. Last month's shutdown of most activities in China's most populous city to contain virus outbreaks jolted financial markets already on edge about Russia's war on Ukraine, higher U.S. interest rates, and a Chinese economic slowdown. The ruling Communist Party is trying to fine-tune its "zero tolerance" pandemic strategy to rein in job losses and other costs to the world's second-largest economy. The Shanghai government has announced tax refunds, cuts in rent, and low-cost loans for small businesses.

Seoul: North Korea fired old ICBM, not new big one

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea dismissed North Korea's claim to have launched a newly developed intercontinental ballistic missile last month, accusing the country of firing a less-powerful existing weapon and fabricating data following an earlier failed launch. North Korea said it launched a Hwasong-17 missile, its longest-range developmental ICBM, in its biggest weapons test in years. Its state media called the launch "a historical event" and released a stylized Hollywood-style video showing leader Kim Jong Un, in sunglasses and leather jacket, supervising the launch. But South Korea's Defense Ministry said it has determined that what North Korea fired wasn't a Hwasong-17 but a Hwasong-15, another ICBM that it successfully tested in 2017.

Australia aims to ease inflation pressures ahead of election

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's government presented a range of economic measures last week such as halving the tax on gasoline to help cushion the impact of high inflation and win votes at elections due by May. Inflation fuelled by the Ukraine war, the pandemic's disruption to supply chains, and widespread flooding disasters across central and eastern Australia is expected to reach 4.5% in the current fiscal year which ends on June 30, according to Treasury Department documents. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg outlined his economic blueprint for the next fiscal year with an eye to elections that must be held by May 21.



PEACEFUL PROTEST. Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami poses in Tokyo for media during a press conference at Waseda University in this September 22, 2021 file photo. Playing James Taylor's "Never Die Young" and going back to songs that marked the antiwar movement in the 1960s, Murakami added his voice to protests against the war in Ukraine with a special edition of his Japanese radio show. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko, File)

Murakami plays antiwar songs on radio to protest Ukraine war

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Playing James Taylor's "Never Die Young" and going back to songs that marked the antiwar movement in the 1960s, author Haruki Murakami added his voice to protests against the war in Ukraine with a special edition of his Japanese radio show.

"Does music have the power to stop war? Sadly, the answer is no," Murakami said. "But it has the power to make listeners believe that war is something we must stop."

For his 55-minute program in mid-March called "Music to put an end to war," broadcast across Japan by Tokyo FM, Murakami chose 10 tracks from his collections of records and CDs at home that "in my mind best fit our theme."

Some were more straightforward antiwar songs and others, "songs that deal with the importance of human life, love, and dignity, they can be considered antiwar songs in some broader sense."

"Lyrics are going to play a big part in tonight's show, so be sure to keep an open ear," Murakami reminded his listeners. "By the end of the show, I have a feeling that you'll be more inspired to bring an end to war. Time will tell."

For some songs he rehearsed passages of the lyrics he translated into Japanese in his own words, adding historical background that included racial and social disparities while conveying the message of anger, sorrow, and love.

The antiwar songs from the 1960s included Peter, Paul & Mary's "Cruel War," which he used to play as part of a folk song band in high school, and "Unknown Soldier" by the Doors, which he remembered always playing on the

radio in his college days.

With his youth years overlapping with the antiwar movement, his words — and choice of songs — gave a deeper meaning and relevance to the conflict in Ukraine.

He opened his program with James Taylor's "Never Die Young," a song aimed at young people in the city losing their lives to drugs and crime.

"There's a clear connection here to young people sent to war," he said. "In a war started by an older generation, it's the younger generation that gives up their lives. That's the way it's been for a long time, and it's truly heartbreaking."

As he played "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream," written by folk singer Ed McCurdy in 1950, he recalled the year the Korean War started, the Cold War turned hot, and the threat of nuclear war intensified. Murakami chose the version performed by the Weavers, whose records were banned on the radio because of their antiwar message.

Murakami provided his Japanese translation of passages from reggae singer Eddy Grant's "Living on the Front Line," explaining that the front line also was about "a society on the brink of destruction." Grant mostly wanted to get African tribes to stop killing each other, but "his heartfelt lyrics could really apply to any war."

He chose "Blowin' In The Wind" that Stevie Wonder sang for Bob Dylan's 30th anniversary concert celebration in 1992, and summarized what Wonder, before performing, told the audience — that despite the civil-rights movement and the Vietnam War, the world's troubles haven't ended and the song remained relevant.

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Fijian Dollar	2.0713
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8343
Indian Rupee	75.958
Indonesian Rupiah	14357
Iranian Rial	42177
Japanese Yen	122.8
Laos New Kip	11795
Malaysian Ringgit	4.208
Nepal Rupee	121.65
Pakistani Rupee	183.9
Papua N.G. Kina	3.53
Philippine Peso	51.572
Russian Ruble	82.875
Saudi Riyal	3.7512
Singapore Dollar	1.357
South Korean Won	1217.9
Sri Lankan Rupee	293.94
Taiwan Dollar	28.671
Thai Baht	33.43
Vietnam Dong	27782