

WORLD

Briefly

UNITED STATES Former ambassador charged with spying

A former US ambassador to Bolivia has been arrested and charged with spying for Cuba over a 40-year span, the Justice Department announced on Monday. US Attorney General Merrick Garland laid out the allegations against Victor Manuel Rocha, 73, a former member of the White House's National Security Council now accused of using his positions within government to support Cuba's clandestine intelligence gathering against the US. But the complaint is short on specifics of how Rocha may have assisted Cuba. There was no immediate comment from Havana.

INDONESIA Search on for missing after Marapi eruption

Rescuers searching the hazardous slopes of Indonesia's Mount Marapi volcano found more bodies among the climbers caught by a surprise eruption two days ago, raising the number of confirmed and presumed dead to 23. More than 50 climbers were rescued after the initial eruption on Sunday, and 11 others were initially confirmed dead. Another eruption Monday spewed a new burst of hot ash as high as 800 meters into the air and temporarily halted search operations. The rescuers are contending with bad weather and terrain constraints, as the scouring wind brings heat from the eruptions.

THE PHILIPPINES Buildings evacuated as quake hits Manila

Workers, residents and students evacuated buildings in the Philippine capital Manila on Tuesday after an earthquake of magnitude 5.9 struck off the main Luzon island, according to the state seismology agency and images carried by media. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The seismology agency said on X, formerly Twitter, that it did not expect damage, but warned of aftershocks. Three people died from a magnitude-7.4 earthquake that struck the southern Philippines on Saturday night. It was followed by more than 2,000 aftershocks.

JAPAN Five bodies found after Osprey crash

US and Japanese dive teams found the remains of five more crew members from a V-22 Osprey aircraft that crashed off Western Japan last week, the Pentagon said on Monday. Eight crew members were aboard the tilt-rotor aircraft when it crashed during a training mission on Nov 29 off the shores of Yakushima Island. Prior to this week's discovery, one body had been recovered. Two crew members remain unaccounted for. Following the crash, the US military unit that the V-22 Osprey aircraft belonged to suspended flight operations.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A Palestinian boy carrying a baby stands at a site of Israeli strikes in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. The fighting has brought unprecedented deaths, destruction and a humanitarian crisis to the coastal enclave. MOHAMMED SALEM / REUTERS

UN foresees 'hellish scenario' in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS/GAZA — A UN official has warned that "an even more hellish scenario" looms in the Gaza Strip where humanitarian aid simply grinds to a halt, as Israeli forces pressed ahead with their air and ground bombardment. "The conditions required to deliver aid to the people of Gaza do not exist," Lynn Hastings, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, said on Monday.

Since the end of a seven-day truce on Friday, Israeli forces have pushed into southern Gaza, "forcing tens of thousands ... into increasingly compressed spaces, desperate to find food, water, shelter and safety", Hastings said. "Nowhere is safe in Gaza and there is nowhere left to go. If possible, an even more hellish scenario is about to unfold, one in which humanitarian operations may not be able to respond," she said in a statement.

Hastings rejected the idea of "safe zones" urged upon Israel by the United States, where people are still unable to move about freely.

"These zones cannot be safe nor humanitarian when unilaterally declared," she said.

"What we see today are shelters with no capacity, a health system on its knees, a lack of clean drink-

ing water, no proper sanitation and poor nutrition for people already mentally and physically exhausted: a textbook formula for epidemics and a public health disaster."

Further complicating aid deliveries, two major roads in Gaza have been declared off-limits to UN teams and trucks, Hastings said.

Hastings has her base in Jerusalem, but Israel informed the United Nations last week that it would not renew her visa, accusing her of not being "impartial".

In time of need

China had recently shipped eight trucks of aid supplies, including cans, biscuits, milk, honey, and drinking water to Egypt's Arish city, which will then be transferred to the coastal enclave via the Rafah border crossing, said Chinese Ambassador to Egypt Liao Liqiang in Cairo on Sunday.

He said China has actively played its role as a responsible major country since the eruption of the latest Israel-Palestine conflict, and had previously announced it would provide food, medicine and other urgent humanitarian assistance to the enclave.

Diab al-Louh, Palestine's ambassador to Egypt, extended the sincere thanks and respect of the

Palestinian Authority and Palestinian people to China for kindly providing help in times of need when the Gazan people are mired in a humanitarian disaster.

On Tuesday, residents and journalists on the ground in Gaza said the intense Israeli airstrikes in southern Gaza included areas where Israel had told people to seek shelter.

Israel largely captured the northern half of Gaza in November, and has swiftly pushed deep into the southern half since the weeklong truce collapsed on Friday. The Gaza health ministry said about 900 Palestinians have been killed since Friday.

Hamas ally Islamic Jihad's armed wing said its fighters engaged in fierce clashes with Israeli soldiers north and east of Khan Younis, Gaza's main southern city.

Israeli tanks have driven into Gaza across the border and cut off the main north-south route, residents said. The Israeli military said the central road out of Khan Younis to the north "constitutes a battlefield" and is now shut.

In eight weeks of conflict, the Gaza health ministry said at least 15,899 Palestinians have been killed and 70 percent of them were women or children under the age of 18.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

New US rules on EV sector set to backfire

Move to cut incentives for vehicles with Chinese batteries may hit own industry

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

The United States' move to cut a consumer incentive for electric vehicles that contain battery materials from China likely will make EVs less affordable, and is being criticized as a wrong approach to addressing supply chain issues.

Starting next year, EV buyers in the US will not be able to claim the full \$7,500 federal tax credit if they purchase autos containing battery parts from China and other countries considered a "foreign entity of concern".

The administration of President Joe Biden announced the new rules on Friday with the hope of encouraging development of local auto-supply chains.

But industry experts said self-sufficiency does not happen overnight, as China dominates the global market for EV batteries and materials. They warned the move will slow the nation's transition from gasoline-powered vehicles.

"If you block the Chinese supply chain from coming to the US, you're actually adding a cost penalty to the supply chain and then causing consumers to pay more for the products, which is not going to encourage people to adopt the technology," Bill Russo, founder and CEO of Automobility, a strategy and investment advisory firm, told China Daily.

The Biden administration has set a target for half of new passenger vehicles sold in the country to be electric by 2030. But experts are concerned the new rules are likely to slow consumer acceptance of EVs.

"It's the affordability that drives consumer acceptance; you can sell premium-price vehicles to the top 2 percent elites in California, but that's not going to scale nationally.

You've got to get it to the point where the average person can afford it," Russo said.

The demand for EVs is growing at a fast pace in China, owing to its capacity to deliver affordable products at high volume, said Russo. He said the capability to vertically integrate key components with economies of scale makes it possible.

The new rules are required under the Inflation Reduction Act approved by Congress last year, which bars electric cars from qualifying for the full tax break if critical minerals or other battery components were made by a "foreign entity of concern".

Monumental task

Out of more than 100 EV models for sale in the US, only about 20 vehicles qualify now, and the new rules could eliminate all eligible EVs on the market, according to the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents car and battery makers in the US.

"But the EV transition requires nothing short of a complete transformation of the US industrial base. It's a monumental task that won't happen overnight," John Bozzella, president and CEO of the trade group, wrote in a post following Friday's announcement.

Russo raised the question in the gray area: "How do you do that without China?"

He added: "So the answer for me is: You cooperate to do that, as China did to build up its own capabilities. It relied on foreign investment. I think the way the US has to get competitive now in this clean-energy economy is by encouraging cross-border investment to build up its own domestic supply chain with certain guidelines and certain rules."

Putin: Blasts disrupted ties with Berlin

By REN QI in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Cooperation between Moscow and Berlin had been disrupted by last September's blasts affecting Nord Stream pipelines that had pumped Russian gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said.

Putin made the remarks on Monday while accepting the credentials of more than 20 new foreign ambassadors to Russia, including those of Germany and the United Kingdom, at a Kremlin ceremony.

"The current frozen state of Germany's relations with Russia — and this is not on our initiative, I want to

emphasize — is unprofitable. It is unprofitable both for us and for you, but especially, in my view, for Germany," Putin said.

"Energy has always been an attractive area of bilateral cooperation. This cooperation was literally disrupted by the sabotage on the Nord Stream pipelines."

Russia's relations with the West are at the lowest level since the Cold War due to its special military operation in Ukraine. Russia has blamed the United States, the UK and Ukraine for the pipeline blasts. They have all denied any involvement.

He said a more just multipolar world order will inevitably replace the old unipolar system, calling this

transition an "objective process" which is also "irreversible".

On the battlefield, Russian Major General Vladimir Zavodsky, deputy commander of the 14th Army Corps of the Northern Fleet, had died while on duty in Ukraine, an official said on Monday, the latest high-ranking Russian military figure to die during the 21-month conflict.

The conflict continues as Russia and Ukraine meet historic cold weather this winter.

The White House issued a stark warning on Monday that US aid for Ukraine will run out by the end of the year, saying that if Congress fails to agree on funding, it will "kneecap" Kyiv's fight.



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers a speech as he meets with 21 new foreign ambassadors and receives their diplomatic credentials at the Kremlin in Moscow on Monday. VYACHESLAV PROKOFYEV / REUTERS

"We are out of money — and nearly out of time," White House budget director Shalanda Young said in a blunt letter to Republican House

Speaker Mike Johnson, reflecting President Joe Biden's growing frustration with a congressional stalemate, Agence France-Presse commented.

International Education Column

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