10 | Wednesday, May 22, 2024

## WORLD

## Sunak sorry for institutional blood scandal cover-up

LONDON - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak apologized on Monday for the failures of successive governments over an infected blood scandal that led to 3,000 deaths and said it was a "day of national shame".

The final report of a public inquiry  $\,$ into the scandal accused the government of covering up the disaster.

Former judge Brian Langstaff, who chaired the inquiry, said more than 30,000 people received blood and blood products tainted with HIV or hepatitis from the 1970s to the early 1990s from the National Health Service, destroying lives, dreams and families.

The government hid the truth to "save face and to save expense", he said, adding that the cover-up was "more subtle, more pervasive and more chilling in its implications" than any orchestrated conspiracy plot.

Sunak apologized to the victims and said the report's publication marked "a day of shame for the British state".

'Today's report shows a decadeslong moral failure at the heart of our national life. From the National Health Service to the civil service, to ministers in successive governments, at every level the people and institutions in which we place our trust failed in the most harrowing and devastating way," he told a packed and silent House of Commons.

"This is an apology from the state — to every single person impacted by this scandal. It did not have to be this way; it should never have been this way. And on behalf of this and every government stretching back to the 1970s, I am truly sorry.

The families of victims and survivors had sought justice for years and Langstaff, who led a six-year inquiry, said the scale of what happened was both horrifying and astonishing.

In some cases, blood products made from donations from prisoners



Families affected by the infected blood scandal rally outside the Methodist Central Hall in London on Monday. LEON NEAL VIA GETTY IMAGES

from the United States or other highrisk groups paid to donate were used on children, infecting them with HIV or hepatitis C, long after the risks

Other victims were used in medical trials without their knowledge or consent. Those who contracted HIV were often shunned by their communities.

Stephen Lawrence received blood after he was knocked down by a police car in London in 1985. Two years later, he was diagnosed with HIV and hepatitis C at the age of 15.

"I was accused of being on drugs, drinking, all that," he told Reuters, adding that he had not been compensated because his records had gone missing.

"It's about justice," he said. "I've been struggling with this for 37 years."

Payments of 210,000 pounds (\$267,000) will be made to living infected beneficiaries, Cabinet Office Minister John Glen said on Tuesday. Sunak is reported to have authorized payments worth about \$12.7 billion.

"Politics itself failed you," the opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer said. "That failure applies to all parties including my own. There is only one word: sorry.

"And by that apology, I acknowledge that this suffering was caused by wrongdoing, delay and systemic failure across the board, compounded by institutional defensiveness."

Former prime minister Theresa  $May, who \ commissioned \ the \ report \ in$ 2017 when she was incumbent, said there had been "a devastating and abject failure of the British state

medical professionals, civil servants, politicians - all of whom felt their job was to protect their own reputation rather than to serve and look after the public who they were there to serve".

At a news conference held on Monday by parliamentary campaigners for the victims' justice, former health secretary Andy Burnham said he believes entire government depart ments should also face prosecution.

"There must now be full consideration of prosecutions, and I would include in that the potential for corporate manslaughter charges against Whitehall departments," he said.

Jonathan Powell in London contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Curtains come down on Mt Fuji view for Japan's tourists

FUJIKAWAGUCHIKO, Japan -A Japanese town mounted a large mesh barrier at a popular viewing spot for Mount Fuji on Tuesday. in an attempt to deter photo-taking by an ever-growing number of tourists.

Japan's most famous sight can be seen for kilometers around, but Fujikawaguchiko locals are fed up with streams of mostly foreign visitors littering, trespassing and breaking traffic rules in their hunt for a photo to share on social media.

Parking illegally and ignoring a smoking ban, they would cram a pavement to shoot the snowcapped mountain, which soars photogenically into the sky from behind a

convenience store, residents said. "I'm really happy that foreigners are coming to our town," said Kikue Katsumata, 73, a lifelong resident of Fujikawaguchiko. "But when it comes to taking pictures from Lawson, the road is a bit narrow and it can be dangerous when people dash across without using a crosswalk."

Workers began putting the black netting measuring 2.5 by 20 meters in place on Tuesday, and they were already done by late morning, an Agence France-Presse reporter at the scene said.

 $\hbox{``I think it's disappointing that they}\\$ are putting it up. It's obviously an iconic shot." said Christina Roys, 36, a tourist from New Zealand.

"But it's completely understandable. We were here last night, managing to get the last shot before they were putting up the wall, and there were so many people."

March and April set all-time

records for visitor arrivals, which have been driven by pent-up demand after the pandemic and the yen's slide to a 34-year low has made Japan an irresistible bargain. That has been good news for the economy, with travelers spending a record \$11.2 billion in the first three months of this year, according to the tourist agency. But as in other tourist hot spots,

such as Venice in Italy, which recently launched an entry fee trial for day visitors, the influx has not been universally welcomed.

In Japan's ancient capital Kyoto locals have complained of tourists harassing the city's famed geisha.

And hikers using the most popular route to climb Mount Fuji this summer will be charged 2,000 yen (\$13) each, with entries capped at 4,000 to ease congestion.

Mount Fuji is covered in snow most of the year. But during the July-September hiking season, more than 220,000 visitors trudge up its steep, rocky slopes.



A worker installs a barrier to block the sight of Mount Fuji emerging from behind a convenience store in the town of Fujikawaguchiko, Yamanashi Prefecture, on Tuesday. KAZUHIRO NOGI / AFP

Many climb through the night to see the sunrise, and some attempt to reach the 3.776-meter summit without breaks, becoming sick or injured as a result.

Regional officials have raised safety and environmental concerns linked to overcrowding on the active volcano, a symbol of Japan and a once-peaceful pilgrimage site.

Residents near other popular photo spots in the region, including

MORE THAN AN MBA ... IT'S

CIMBA ITALY

the so-called Fuji Dream Bridge, have also reportedly complained about overtourism in recent weeks.

One tour operator that offers day trips from Tokyo to the Mount Fuji area told AFP they are taking visitors to another Lawson store nearby where a similar view can be seen, but there are fewer nearby

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

IOWA

# Talks open window for cooperation

Mechanism offers platform for China, US to contribute to global AI regulation

By YIFAN XU in Washington and  $\mathbf{YANG}\,\mathbf{RAN}$  in Beijing

The first intergovernmental dialogue between China and the US is a positive sign for collaboration between the two leading countries in artificial intelligence, experts say, which has established a new platform to draw on each other's governance experiences and contribute to global AI regulation.

Both sides labeled the meeting "constructive" after talks in Geneva. Switzerland, on May 14.

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Institute for China-American Studies in Washington, said there was a genuine sense of "constructiveness" at the AI meeting, "given that it opened a channel for communication on an issue that will require a degree of cooperation and coordination from both sides for a long time and given its importance".

"AI is not going away anywhere," Gupta said, adding it is "ground enough" to label the meeting as "constructive" as the two sides were able to take a preliminary step in establishing a framework for dialogue.

Zhu Rongsheng, an expert from Tsinghua University's Center for International Security and Strategy said that in an era of rising geopolitical competition, it is a significant step for the two leading AI powers to sit down and discuss global AI governance.

"This new dialogue mechanism not only meets the international community's urgent call for AI governance but also showcases the responsible roles both nations can play," Zhu said.

"AI-related technologies like deepfakes and misinformation have shown their global impact. By collaborating, the US and China can enhance their regulatory frameworks to protect their citizens and offer guidance to other countries.

### Responsible role

It is hoped the United States can work with China in this field to play a responsible role as major powers, jointly establishing rules to protect the interests of the global majority, said Zhu, who is also a senior researcher at Meta-Strategy Institute, a think tank in

Gupta said: "There's value in all the big players in the system coming and proposing common rules by which AI is regulated at the international level. And so that's also a useful area of dialogue within the framework of this conversation."

In the context of current China-US relations featuring a mix of competition and cooperation, this intergovernmental dialogue mechanism opens new communication channels that help both sides clearly express their AI-related security concerns and development goals, reducing misunderstandings and strategic  $misjudgments, Zhu\ said.$ 

However, the US' suppression and containment of China regarding AI have increased the difficulties in bilateral dialogue in this field, he said.

On May 8, a bipartisan group of members from the US House of Representatives unveiled the Enhancing National Frameworks for Overseas Restriction of Critical Exports Act, which seeks to restrict the export of US AI systems to prevent "foreign rival-ries" from using US AI technology.

#### **Restricting exports**

It also aims to restrict the export of the systems to foreign competitors and authorizes the US Department of Commerce to prohibit US people from working with foreigners to develop AI systems that allegedly pose a risk to US national security.

The act defines an AI system as "any software or hardware implementation of artificial intelligence, including artificial intelligence model weights and any numerical parameters associated with the AI implementation". The previous gradual tighten-

chips and the consideration of licensing US cloud computing companies to provide advanced AI computing power to foreign customers - especially those in China - are measures to escalate export controls in AI. Such actions are intended to

ing of US restrictions on advanced

"raise the fences", Gupta said.

Zhu said: "The US approach is like 'cutting off your nose to spite

"It might also be impractical because AI system encompasses multiple facets such as hardware, software and data. Banning software, in particular, is especially challenging.

"If the US continues to contain China in this manner, it risks losing potential users and partners for American AI products and services in China. This would not only hinder short-term profits but also pose potential long-term losses for the US."

 $Contact\ the\ writers\ at$ yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com.





