

Headlines:

- **Partygate: UK Prime Minister says He will Not Resign**
- **Pakistan: Ex-PM Imran Khan Demands New Government to Announce Elections in 6 days**
- **Blinken says China is a Serious Long-term Challenge but the U.S. does not want a New Cold War**

Details:

Partygate: UK Prime Minister Says he will Not Resign

Boris Johnson has insisted he will remain as prime minister despite the "bitter and painful" judgement of a report into parties held in Downing Street during Covid restrictions. Excessive drinking, mistreatment of cleaners and security staff and Covid rule-breaking was highlighted in civil servant Sue Gray's report. She said the leadership in No 10 "must bear responsibility" for its culture. Some opponents have repeated their calls for Mr Johnson to quit. However in a press conference on Wednesday, the prime minister ruled out resigning, saying: "I've got to keep moving forward." Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer had earlier called on Conservative MPs to remove him, saying it was time for Mr Johnson "to pack his bags". Addressing the Commons, Mr Johnson said he took "full responsibility for everything that took place on my watch", had been "humbled" and learned lessons. He told MPs that when he had previously said "the rules and guidance had been followed at all times", it had been "what I believed to be true". He said he had attended events to wish staff who were leaving farewell and his attendance had not been found to be outside the rules. He apologised and, pointedly, went out of his way to explain why he believed he had not knowingly misled the Commons in his previous accounts of what happened. This is crucial, because being proven to have intentionally lied to the House would cost him his job. But the prime minister added that he didn't think, at the time, he'd done anything wrong at the event that led to him being fined by police. There is deep anger and embarrassment among many Tory MPs over what has happened. They know much of this can't be easily excused or wished away. But plenty of cabinet ministers have publicly expressed their loyalty to the prime minister. [Source: BBC News].

Johnson has turned 10 Downing Street into the UK address that has the greatest number of fines issued for breaking Covid rules. In his defense, Johnson keeps on reiterating that he does not recall doing anything wrong. It is clear that those who make the rules break them with impunity and do not care about the consequences, their main focus is to stay in power. What is much worse is that the people also do not care enough to remove the criminal Johnson out of office.

Pakistan: Ex-PM Imran Khan Demands New Government to Announce Elections in 6 days

Defiant former Prime Minister Imran Khan early Thursday warned Pakistan's government to set new elections in the next six days or he will again march on the capital along with two million people. Khan spoke at a rally of thousands of demonstrators in Islamabad aiming to bring down the government and force early elections. The government earlier had summoned troops to guard important buildings, including the parliament and offices of the president and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The measures came following clashes between demonstrators and police. Khan in his address claimed that five of his supporters were killed in the violence across the country. There was no immediate comment from the government about Khan's claim, whose supporters were dispersing. Earlier, Khan had vowed that he will stage a prolonged sit-in to get his demands accepted. Khan, a former cricket star turned politician, was prime minister for over three and half years until being ousted last month by a no-confidence vote in Parliament. Since then, he has held rallies across the country, saying his removal from office was the result of a US-organized plot and collusion with Sharif. Both have denied the allegation. Khan began his march toward Islamabad from the northwestern city of Peshawar. Clashes initially erupted in the eastern city of Lahore, when riot police fired tear gas and pushed back hundreds of

demonstrators who hurled stones as they tried to pass a roadblocked bridge near the city to board busses bound for Islamabad. Dozens of Khan's followers also briefly clashed with police in Islamabad, where the demonstrators set fire to bushes lining a main boulevard, sending smoke and flames rising into the sky. Altercations were also reported elsewhere, including in Karachi, where demonstrators burned a police vehicle. At least a dozen demonstrators and several policemen were injured. Ahead of Wednesday's marches, authorities used dozens of shipping containers and trucks to block off major roads into Islamabad. Khan himself travelled by helicopter to a highway some 100 kilometers northwest of Islamabad, where he condemned the police crackdown and urged supporters to join the rally. The government on Wednesday responded by launching a crackdown and arrested more than 1,700 Khan supporters. The measures were announced after a policeman was killed Tuesday during a raid on the home of a notable Khan supporter in Lahore. [Source: Khaleej Times]

As the army, government and Khan edge towards a deal, what is painfully obvious is that the troika do not have any solutions to turn around the ailing fortunes of Pakistan. The troika have tried a mixture of Western solutions between but failed. Khan's supporters argue that he needs more time to implement the same Western solutions the army and Sharif have already implemented. They are deluded and hero worship has blinded them to painful reality that Western solutions will never work, even if an angel assumed the prime minstership.

Blinken says China is a Serious Long-term Challenge but the U.S. Does not Want a New Cold War

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday described China as the "most serious long-term challenge to the international order," even as the world grapples with Russia's war in Ukraine. "China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it," Blinken said in a speech at George Washington University. "Beijing's vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world's progress over the past 75 years," Blinken said. The speech, which outlined the Biden administration's policy toward China, comes as the U.S. warns the world's second-largest economy not to help Moscow blunt global sanctions for the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine. It also follows a Biden administration effort to calm Beijing's anger over Biden's comment that the U.S. was willing to use its military to defend Taiwan. Blinken reiterated that the U.S. policy has not changed and that the Biden administration remains committed to a "One China" policy, a diplomatic agreement that there is only one Chinese government but allows the U.S. to maintain an unofficial relationship with Taiwan. "We do not support Taiwan independence, and we expect cross-strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means," he said. "Our policy has not changed. What has changed is Beijing's growing coercion, like trying to cut off Taiwan's relations with countries around the world and blocking it from participating in international organizations." Blinken acknowledged that the U.S. will have to compete with China on multiple fronts but took steps to avoid ratcheting up tensions between the countries. "We will align our efforts with our network of allies and partners acting with a common purpose and common cause and harnessing these two key assets," Blinken said. "We will compete with China to defend our interests and our vision for the future." Tensions between Beijing and Washington soared during the Trump administration. Former President Donald Trump placed blame squarely on China for a wide range of grievances, including intellectual property theft, unfair trade practices and the coronavirus pandemic. Blinken on Thursday tried to downplay the strain between the two countries and said that the U.S. hopes to work together on pressing global challenges. "We have profound differences with the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government, but those differences are between governments and systems and not between our people," Blinken said. [Source: CNBC].

Blinkin's speech belies intense American efforts to further isolate China in the Asian Pacific region. Taking advantage of Russia's preoccupation in Ukraine, the US has swiftly moved to shore up the QUAD and simultaneously encourage its allies like Taiwan, Philippines, Japan, and other countries to stiffen their stance towards China. How Beijing reacts will come to define the region for the foreseeable future.