

NEWSIN
brief

‘Jihadists’ kill 18 people in Burkina Faso

AFP, Ouagadougou

Suspected jihadists have killed 18 civilians in an attack in northern Burkina Faso, the governor of Sahel region said. “The defence and security forces brought back the body of the nurse to give it to her family in Yalgo and secure the area to allow the burial of other victims,” Colonel Salfo Kabore said on Sunday. Several similar attacks were carried out a week ago in the country’s north, with one on January 25 leaving 39 civilians dead in the neighbouring province of Soum, northwest of Seno.

Cross-border mortar kills 7 in Pakistan

AFP, Khar

A mortar shell fired from Afghanistan hit a house in a border village in northwest Pakistan Sunday, killing seven people who were members of the same family, officials said. “The mortar fired from Afghanistan hit the house of local villager Fazal Ghani. He along with his wife and five other members of the family died on spot,” senior police official Gulzar Khan told AFP. The dead included three women, three children and the head of the family.

Greek police fire tear gas at migrants

AFP, Lesbos Island

Police on the Greek island of Lesbos yesterday fired tear gas at hundreds of migrants protesting against tougher new asylum rules, officials said. Brandishing makeshift signs with the word “freedom”, some 2,000 men and women walked out of the overpopulated camp of Moria to demonstrate. The protesters walked some seven kilometres (4.3 miles) towards the port capital of Mytilene, but were blocked by police outside the town.



Parents bring their kids to school wearing protective facemasks in Bangkok yesterday. Thailand so far has detected 19 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus believed to have originated in Chinese city of Wuhan. *Inset*, medical staff members from Shenyang bidding farewell with family members and friends before leaving for Wuhan at Xiantao International Airport in China’s northeastern Liaoning province.

PHOTO: AFP



Residents stock up on food

HK suspends 4 more border crossings with mainland China

AGENCIES

Panic-stricken residents have emptied shelves in major supermarkets in Hong Kong, stockpiling meat, rice, cleaning products and soap as fears escalate over a coronavirus epidemic on the mainland. The rush to procure food in the city of 7.4 million people is unprecedented, residents say, describing it as far worse than the panic during the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that killed nearly 800 people around the world, including nearly 300 in Hong Kong.

The new coronavirus originated in central China’s Hubei province and has so far killed 361 people in the country.

Over the weekend in Hong Kong, hundreds of people queued for hours to buy masks and immune-boosting products such as vitamin C.

At a major supermarket in the bustling Wan Chai district, counters selling chilled meat and seafood were empty by mid-morning on Friday and over the weekend, with stocks of fresh vegetables dwindling.

“Everybody is really worried. I think everyone is afraid of what is going to happen in the next few days. Prices are also going to rise,” said Cindy, a

retail executive who was buying dry food and soap.

Dozens of mask-wearing shoppers pushed trolleys down empty aisles showing sold-out signs for hand wash and antiseptic liquids. Others tried to stock up on remaining bags of rice and packaged noodles.

The rush to buy food and cleaning products comes as some shoppers said they were concerned that a potential shutdown of the border would impact the supply of products.

Around 90 percent of the city’s total food supply is imported, with the bulk coming from the mainland, according to official data, reports Reuters.

Hong Kong’s leader Carrie Lam announced the closure of four more border crossings with mainland China yesterday, leaving just three checkpoints open, but stopped short of demands for the entire

border to be closed to curb the spread of the new coronavirus.

Meanwhile, China’s foreign ministry yesterday criticised the US for being the first to evacuate nationals without providing “substantial assistance” to China, reports AFP.

The US actions had caused “panic”, said spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

CORONAVIRUS FEARS IN HONG KONG

Around 90pc of city’s total food supply is imported, with the bulk coming from China

US reaction to virus spreads ‘panic’: China

Drug cocktail seems to help fight virus

AFP, Bangkok

A Chinese woman infected with the new coronavirus showed a dramatic improvement after she was treated with a cocktail of anti-virals used to treat flu and HIV, Thailand’s health ministry said Sunday night.

The 71-year-old patient tested negative for the virus 48 hours after Thai doctors administered the combination, doctor Kriengsak Attipornwanich said during the ministry’s daily press briefing.

“The lab result of positive on the coronavirus turned negative in 48 hours,” Kriengsak said.

“From being exhausted before, she could sit up in bed 12 hours later.”

The doctors combined the anti-flu drug oseltamivir with lopinavir and ritonavir, anti-virals used to treat HIV, Kriengsak said, adding the ministry was awaiting research results to prove the findings.

The news comes as the new virus claimed its first life outside China -- a 44-year-old Chinese man who died in the Philippines -- while the death toll in China has soared above 300.

Thailand so far has detected 19 confirmed cases of the virus believed to have originated in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, which is under lockdown.

That is the second highest number of cases outside of China, with Japan recording 20.

So far, eight patients in Thailand have recovered and returned home, while 11 remain in hospital.



White House candidates brace for Iowa vote

Months into the Democratic nomination marathon, after seven debates, countless rallies, bitter candidate clashes and an impeachment effort to remove the US president, Iowa was set to hold the first-in-the-nation vote yesterday to see who challenges Donald Trump in November. More than two dozen White House hopefuls began the journey, some as early as a year ago. Eleven now remain, exactly nine months from Election Day. Despite the historically diverse field consisting of men and women of color and young candidates with little Washington exposure, the two frontrunners are septuagenarian white men -- Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden -- with more than 80 years of political experience between them.

Norway sued over ‘risky’ spy recruitment

A concrete producer took the Norwegian state to court yesterday claiming the intelligence agencies’ clumsy approach to recruiting informants had caused the company financial loss. At Oslo district court, concrete manufacturer Olen Betong accused the Norwegian internal (PST) and external (E-tjeneste) intelligence services of contacting two employees working in the Murmansk region in order to turn them into informants. The company, with business in Russia’s north-west, said the intelligence services had made repeated indiscrete contact over the last decade, which was spotted by Russian government agencies. Olen Betong claimed this led to the loss of an important contract in Russia and legal trouble for company founder Atle Berge and employee Kurt Sto.

Dozens of koalas lying dead at Australian logging site



Dozens of koalas have been euthanized and some 80 more are being treated for injuries and starvation after their habitat was logged, prompting an Australian government investigation yesterday. Victoria’s environment department said the state’s conservation regulator was investigating a “very distressing incident” at a bluegum plantation near the coastal town of Portland that resulted in the deaths of dozens of koalas. “If this is found to be due to deliberate human action, we expect the conservation regulator to act swiftly against those responsible,” the department said. Those responsible could face steep fines under laws designed to protect Australia’s native wildlife.

SOURCE: AFP

UK’s Johnson, Barnier trade blows over post-Brexit ties

AFP, London

Britain and the EU yesterday laid down their red lines for post-Brexit trade talks, offering contrasting visions for their future relationship that raise the prospect of clashes to come.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson envisioned his country as a global champion of free trade, emphatically rejecting EU insistence on full alignment with Brussels.

But he still pledged not to “undermine EU standards”, after the UK finally went its own way on Friday after nearly half a century in the bloc and an 11-month transition period began.

Worries over trade negotiations sent the pound sinking more than 1.1 percent against the dollar in London midday deals yesterday.

“I see no need to bind ourselves to an agreement with the EU,” Johnson said in a speech at the Old Royal Naval College, which chronicles Britain’s past as a

maritime superpower.

“We will restore full sovereign controls over our borders, immigration, competition, subsidy rules, procurement (and) data protection.”

He added: “We will not engage in some cut-throat race to the bottom.

“We are not leaving the EU to undermine European standards. We will not engage in any kind of dumping, whether commercial, social or environmental.”

In Brussels, EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier formally offered a deep future relationship but only as long as Britain makes guarantees to trade fairly.

Barnier said fisheries and fair trade would be his top priorities in the talks, with a special focus on denying Britain “unfair competitive advantages”.

Brussels will offer a close post-Brexit trading relationship -- but will demand tough terms on fisheries and a level playing field for businesses, he said.



Palestinian women take part in a protest against a US-brokered Middle East peace plan, while holding placard that reads in Arabic “down with the deal of the century” in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Political design behind anti-CAA stir in Delhi: Modi

TOI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday broke his silence over the anti-CAA protests in the national capital and said there was a political design behind the stir.

Launching a scathing attack at the opposition, PM Modi said, “Protests in Seelampur, Shaheen Bagh and Jamia over CAA are no coincidence but an experiment.”

Blaming the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress for playing vote-bank politics in the national capital, Modi said that “these people are saving those who want to break India into pieces.”

“If the protests had been against one law, they would



have ended after assurances of the government. But AAP and Congress are provoking people. Constitution and tricolour are being kept in front and attention is being diverted from the real conspiracy,” Modi said.

Referring to the ongoing stir at Shaheen Bagh, he slammed the protesters for causing inconvenience to the people commuting between Delhi and Noida.

Urging people to give a decisive mandate for the BJP, Modi said “anarchists can’t be allowed to take over or else tomorrow some other road will be blocked.”

The Shaheen Bagh protests have taken centre stage in the BJP poll campaign with the top party leadership raking it up in every rally.

Turkey, Syria troops trade fire

Erdogan tells Russia to stand aside as 9 civilians killed in Idlib

AFP, Beirut

Turkish and Syrian troops traded deadly fire in Syria’s northwest yesterday, further raising tension between Ankara and regime backer Moscow over the war-torn Idlib rebel enclave.

An air strike also killed at least nine civilians in the same area, where the latest government offensive has caused one of the nine-year-old Syrian conflict’s worst waves of displacement. The tit-for-tat shelling between Damascus and Ankara was the deadliest since Turkey deployed troops in Syria in 2016 and escalated tensions between the conflict’s two top foreign brokers.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had offered rare criticism of Russia last week, accusing it of “not honouring” agreements to prevent a regime offensive on the northwestern region of Idlib.

The overnight clash began with regime shelling on Turkish positions in Idlib, hours after a Turkish military convoy of at least 240 vehicles entered

northwest Syria, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor.

The attack killed four Turkish soldiers and wounded nine others despite previous coordination on where Ankara’s forces would be in

A Turkish military convoy of at least 240 vehicles entered northwest Syria

Rocket attacks by Ankara on regime positions killed 13 Syrian govt troops



the region, Turkey’s defence ministry said. The Russian defence ministry said Ankara had failed to give prior warning of its troop movements at the time of the incident.

Retaliatory rocket attacks by Ankara on regime positions later killed at least 13 Syrian government troops and wounded 20 others in Idlib and the neighbouring provinces of Hama and Latakia, the Observatory said.

Most Syrian troops were killed south of Saraqeb, a flashpoint Idlib town that Damascus has been trying to encircle in recent days, said the Observatory. State news agency SANA said the Syrian army had not suffered any casualties.

Speaking to reporters at an Istanbul airport before leaving for Ukraine, Erdogan called it an “ongoing operation,” and said that 30 to 35 Syrian forces were “neutralised” in the counterattack that targeted 40 locations. “When we have martyrs on our side, it is not possible for us to remain silent,” said Erdogan, warning Russia not to stand in the way of its response.

A senior Turkish official said that the regime attack on Turkish troops and the government offensive in general were conducted “with Russian protection”.

“Russia should remove this protection from the regime elements which attack Turkish forces in this region,” ruling party spokesman Omer Celik told CNN Turk. “Our target is not Russia,” he said. “The regime in this region after this attack is a target for us.”

Russia not target in US army’s Europe deployment: Nato

AFP, Brussels

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg insisted yesterday that a massive transfer of US and allied troops to Eastern Europe as part of a military exercise was not aimed at Russia.

About 37,000 soldiers from 18 countries are to participate in the US-run manoeuvre dubbed Defender Europe 2020.

This is “the largest deployment of US troops to Europe in more than 25 years,” Stoltenberg told AFP.

The exercise “shows the strong US commitment to Nato and to the freedom and security of Europe,” he added.

The exercise will take place in May and June, mainly in Germany, Poland and the Baltic States. The US will move 20,000 soldiers to Europe in the coming months.

“Defender Europe is not directed against any particular country,” Stoltenberg said.

“This defensive exercise demonstrates the ability to rapidly move a large force from the United States to Europe to help protect other Nato Allies, if needed,” he said.

The exercise comes amid doubts over whether the US is still prepared to defend

Europe.

After his inauguration, US President Donald Trump initially described Nato as “obsolete”.

But after Germany and the other European members pledged higher defence spending, Trump reaffirmed his commitment to the alliance.

Nato’s sense of purpose took a boost after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia in 2014, fuelling fears among eastern Nato members.

The alliance has since significantly strengthened its presence in Eastern Europe and built the capability for a rapid deployment of troops in the event of conflict.

Stoltenberg underlined that Nato members Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia celebrated their 30th anniversary of independence this year, referring to the three Baltic states’ split from the Soviet Union.

Portions of “Defender Europe” were to be held in the three countries.

“Russia has every right to feel safe within its borders, but so do our member states,” said Stoltenberg.