

## Russian plane crash-lands on belly, no one seriously hurt

AFP, Moscow

A Russian plane carrying 100 people crash-landed on its belly in the north of the country after problems with its landing gear yesterday, the company and officials said, adding no one was seriously hurt.

The Utair Boeing 737 was buffeted by a sudden change in wind direction as it was landing at Usinsk airport in the northern Komi region, the airline said, and it was already on the tarmac when it suffered a malfunction.

At the time of the crash landing, the airport's instrument landing system was not working and the runway lighting was out, Utair said.

Images online showed a Boeing sitting on its belly on the snow-covered tarmac as passengers scrambled to evacuate.

None of the 94 passengers or six crew members were badly injured, the airline said. One passenger sought medical assistance.



(From top left, clockwise) Thai security forces evacuate students stranded inside the Terminal 21 shopping mall as they try to stop a soldier who was shooting people indiscriminately; people hide in a restaurant during the ordeal; Thai security forces take cover behind an ambulance during the operation; and people pray for victims who died in the mass shooting in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. Photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



## Africa holds 'silence the guns' summit

African heads of state yesterday gathered at the headquarters of the African Union for a summit meeting due to focus on how the body can play a more prominent role in resolving conflicts proliferating across the continent.

The two-day summit has taken as its theme "Silencing the Guns", yet AU officials are well aware of their failure to achieve the goal adopted in 2013 of ending "all wars in Africa by 2020". In remarks to African foreign ministers ahead of the summit, AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat painted a bleak picture of the continent's security situation, citing extremist threats stretching from the Sahel to Somalia. Though some progress has been made recently in Central African Republic and Sudan, long-running conflicts in places like Libya and South Sudan have been joined by new crises from Cameroon to Mozambique.

## Thousands from HK cruise ship freed after virus tests

Thousands of people stranded aboard a cruise ship in Hong Kong for five days were allowed to disembark yesterday after its 1,800 crew tested negative for the deadly new coronavirus. Health authorities in the Asian financial hub said the crew and a similar number of passengers had been released from a quarantine imposed due to fears that some staff could have contracted the deadly virus on a previous voyage and passed it on. The World Dream carried three Chinese passengers to Vietnam between January 19 and 24 who were later found to be infected with the SARS-like coronavirus, which has killed more than 800 people in China since it emerged in December.

## African leaders reject Trump's ME peace plan



African leaders yesterday condemned US President Donald Trump's Mideast peace plan as illegitimate, taking advantage of an African Union summit to voice solidarity with "the Palestinian cause". AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat told assembled heads of state that the plan unveiled in late January represented the "umpteenth violation of multiple United Nations and African Union resolutions". He said that it was prepared without international consultation and that it "trampled on the rights of the Palestinian people", a line that drew applause in the main hall at AU headquarters. Trump's long-delayed peace proposals were immediately rejected by the Palestinians, who have boycotted his administration over its pro-Israel stance. The proposals include giving Israel the green light to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank, the largest part of the territories the Palestinians see as their future state.

SOURCE: AFP

## Iran unveils new ballistic missile Set to launch satellite

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday unveiled a short-range ballistic missile that they said can be powered by a "new generation" of engines designed to put satellites into orbit.

The Guards' Sepahnews website said the Raad-500 missile was equipped with new Zoheir engines made of composite materials lighter than on earlier steel models.

It also unveiled Salman engines made of the same materials but with a "movable nozzle" for the delivery of satellites into space.

The Raad was "a new generation missile that has half the weight of a Fateh-110 missile but with 200 kilometres more range," it added. The Fateh-110 is a ballistic ground-to-ground missile first unveiled in 2002. Its latest generation has a range of 300 kilometres (186 miles).

The missile news came as Iran started counting down yesterday to the launch within hours of a scientific observation satellite that is part of a programme the United States has previously described as a "provocation".

Arch foes Iran and the United States have appeared to be on the brink of an all-out confrontation twice since last year. Washington has also raised concerns in the past about Tehran's satellite programme, saying the launch of a carrier rocket in January 2019 amounted to a violation of curbs on its development of ballistic missiles.

## MASS SHOOTING IN AND AROUND THAI MALL

# Siege ends with killer's death

Rogue soldier kills 26, wounds 57; PM says personal dispute triggered shooting

REUTERS, Nakhon Ratchasima

A soldier angry over a property deal gone sour killed at least 29 people and wounded 57 in a rampage that spanned four locations in and around the northeastern Thai city of Nakhon Ratchasima before he was shot dead early yesterday.

Most of the victims were at the city's Terminal 21 shopping centre, where the shooter held out against an overnight siege with an assault rifle and ammunition stolen from his army base.

Police named him as 32-year-old soldier Jakrapanth Thomma. He initially posted written messages on Facebook during the attack before his account was shut down by the company.

Sharpshooters brought an end to a 17-hour-ordeal when they killed the gunman yesterday morning after a night which was marked by heavy exchanges of gunfire and terrifying dashes for mall exits by shoppers trapped in the Terminal 21 mall in Nakhon Ratchasima, also known as Korat.

"It was a personal conflict...over a house

deal," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters yesterday from Nakhon Ratchasima after travelling there to meet wounded survivors.

"It is unprecedented in Thailand, and I want this to be the last time this crisis happens," he said outside a hospital where



victims were being treated.

Prayuth added that the conflict was with a relative of the soldier's commanding officer.

CCTV footage from inside the mall posted on social media showed the gunman dressed in black and wearing a mask, his gun slung over his shoulder with no sign of other people around.

The killings began at around 3 p.m. (0800 GMT) on Saturday when the well-trained soldier opened fire in a house before moving to an army camp and then driving to the mall in a stolen Humvee.

The soldier's commanding officer was one of the people reported killed before the soldier moved on to the shopping mall and began shooting. At some point during the day, the soldier raided the army camp's weapons storage to arm himself, said Lt General Thanaya Kiatsarn, Commander of the Second Area Command. A guard was killed there.

Hours before he began shooting on Saturday, Jakrapanth had posted on his Facebook account denouncing greedy people.

"Rich from cheating. Taking advantage of other people. Do they think they can spend the money in hell?" read one post in Thai.

He later posted written updates during the attack. "Death is inevitable for everyone," he wrote. Later, he complained about his fingers cramping and asked "Should I give up?" before the account was no longer available.

## NEWSIN brief

### Syria set to retake key M5 highway

AFP, Beirut

Syrian regime forces yesterday were set to retake a key motorway connecting the capital Damascus to second city Aleppo following weeks of battles in the rebel-held Idlib region, a monitor said. The M5 has been long in the sights of the Syrian government as it seeks to revive a moribund economy after nearly nine years of war.

### Libya rival talks end without deal

AFP, Geneva

Talks between representatives of Libya's warring parties in Geneva this week ended Saturday with no deal on a ceasefire but the UN has proposed a second round of negotiations for February 18. The talks aim to end fighting between the UN-recognised government in Tripoli and eastern-based military commander Khalifa Haftar. UN has proposed 18 February 2020 as the date for a new round of talks in Geneva.

### 2 US troops killed by Afghan soldier

AFP, Kabul

Two American troops were killed and six others wounded by an Afghan soldier armed with a machine gun, the US military confirmed yesterday. The incident occurred late Saturday at a base in Sherzad district, in Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan. The deaths came at a sensitive time in the 18-year-old war, with President Donald Trump eager to bring troops home and end the longest conflict in US history.



Students walk with blue cross marks on their faces in protest as they march during an anti-government demonstration in the holy Shia Iraqi city of Karbala, south of the capital Baghdad, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Israel drawing up map for W Bank annexations

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel has begun to draw up maps of land in the occupied West Bank that will be annexed in accordance with US President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday.

"We are already at the height of the process of mapping the area that, according to the Trump plan, will become part of the state of Israel. It won't take too long," Netanyahu said at an election campaign rally in the Maale Adumim settlement.

Netanyahu said the area would include all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley - territory Israel has kept under military occupation since its capture in the 1967 Middle East war but which Palestinians want in a future state.

Most countries consider Israeli settlements on land captured in war to be a violation of international law. Trump has changed US policy to withdraw such objections.

Trump's plan envisages a two-state solution with Israel and a future Palestinian state living alongside each other, but it includes strict conditions that Palestinians reject.

The blueprint gives Israel much of what it has long sought, including US recognition of settlements and Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.

A redrawn, demilitarised Palestinian state would be subject to Israeli control over its security, and would receive tracts of desert in return for arable land settled by Israelis.

Right after Trump presented the plan on Jan. 28, Netanyahu said his government would begin extending Israeli sovereignty to the settlements and the Jordan Valley within days.

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump's impeachment acquittal has delivered the White House a fresh coat of power, sparking worries over the rise of an "imperial presidency."

His victory in the Senate trial on Wednesday accelerated a decades-long shift in the US government in which Congress has steadily ceded authority to the Oval Office.

The presidency hit a low in the 1970s, after Congress wrested authority away following Richard Nixon's Watergate abuses. Since then, each successive US leader has sought to further dominate the legislature.

Trump, though, has sparked anxiety: he flaunts his power, and has an attorney general who favors a strong presidency and a Republican Party unwilling to restrain him.

One of his impeachment lawyers claimed Trump is free to do whatever he wants -- even cheat in elections -- if he believes it is in the national interest.

Trump himself says, citing the US

## Quotas for jobs, promotions not fundamental right: India SC

NDTV ONLINE

Quotas and reservations for promotions for government jobs is not a fundamental right, the Supreme Court of India said in a potentially key judgment delivered on Friday. The top court said it could not compel states to provide quotas and states could not be forced to make such provisions without data showing imbalance in representation of certain communities in public service.

In a verdict delivered on appeals on reservations for SC/ST community members in promotions to Assistant Engineer (Civil) posts in the Public Works Department of the Uttarakhand government, the court said there was no "fundamental right" that allowed for such claims.

"There is no doubt the state government is not bound to make reservations. There is no fundamental right which inheres in an individual to claim reservation in promotions. No mandamus can be issued by the court directing state governments to provide reservations," a bench comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta said.

The Supreme Court's judgment

overturned a 2012 ruling by the Uttarakhand High Court that directed the state to provide quotas to specified communities.

At that time senior advocates Kapil Sibal, Colin Gonsalves and Dushyant Dave had argued the state had a duty to help SCs/STs under Articles 16(4) and 16(4-A) of the Constitution.

On Friday the top court pointed out that while these articles give power to make reservations, it did so only "if in the opinion of the state they are not adequately represented in the services of the state".

"It is settled law the state cannot be directed to provide reservations for appointment in public posts. Similarly, state is not bound to make reservation for SCs/STs in matters of promotions," the court said.

In saying reservation for appointment and promotion was a matter of discretion the court also cautioned that states had to justify decisions - to be taken on basis of quantifiable data - if those were to be challenged.

The issue of reservations is a contentious one, with a petition regarding halting of benefits for well-off members from SC/ST communities - the "creamy layer" - pending in the Supreme Court

## 'Imperial presidency?'

US presidency gains more power with Trump's acquittal



Constitution: "I have the right to do whatever I want as president."

"It is now arguable... that Donald Trump may well have become the most powerful president in American history," historian Jon Meacham said after Trump's trial closed. "President Trump is functionally a monarch at this point. If the king does it, it's okay."

After suffering under the British king, the architects of the US system of government crafted a constitution in 1789 that gave the legislature strong checks on the powers of the new nation's chief executive.

Lawmakers held the upper hand mostly through the early 20th century, until, faced by existential emergencies -- the Great Depression and then World War

II -- president Franklin Roosevelt rode roughshod over Congress to take action.

Since then, "we have seen a steady increase over time in the independent powers of the presidency," said Mark Rozell, dean of the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. "This is not just a Republican thing. It's presidents of both parties," said Rozell.

Executive power got a considerable boost with the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

Republican George W Bush went far beyond his statutory authorities to order actions like secret surveillance of Americans and abduction and torture of foreign fighters, claiming he had the right to do so to protect the country.

Congress did require him to obtain approval to make war on Al-Qaeda and Iraq. But they gave him broad authority, allowing the "War on Terror" to extend to Syria, Yemen and Africa under Bush and his successors.

Nearly two decades later, Congress worries that Trump could use the same powers to go to war with Iran.