

US House passes Democratic police reform bill

The US House of Representatives approved a sweeping Democratic police reform bill on Thursday, sending the measure to the Senate despite opposition from President Donald Trump and his Republican allies in Congress.

2.4 million Yemeni children on the 'brink of starvation'

The number of malnourished children in Yemen could rise to 2.4 million by the end of the year due to a big shortfall in humanitarian funding, the United Nations children's agency UNICEF said yesterday.

Pak PM under fire for bin Laden 'martyrdom' remark

Pakistani opposition parties criticized Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday after he told parliament that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had been "martyred" in 2011 by US forces.



A police officer heckles a supporter of India's main opposition Congress party as others pay tribute to the Indian army soldiers killed in a border clash with Chinese troops in Ladakh region, at India Gate, in New Delhi, yesterday.

India, China reinforce flashpoint amid tension

AGENCIES

India has acknowledged for the first time that it has matched China in massing troops at their contested Himalayan border region after a deadly clash this month.

But India's foreign ministry accused China of causing the tensions by starting military deployments, and warned relations between the world's two most populous nations could be undermined if the standoff continues.

The neighbours have blamed each other for a June 15 battle in the Ladakh region in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed while China suffered an unknown number of casualties.

While each has said it wants to de-escalate the territorial showdown, India's foreign ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava on Thursday said "both sides remain deployed in large numbers in the region, while military and diplomatic contacts are continuing".

Srivastava said "Chinese actions" on the unofficial border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), led to this month's deadly fight with rocks and batons. No shots were fired.

"At the heart of the matter is that since early May, the Chinese side has been amassing a large contingent of troops and armaments along the LAC," the spokesman charged. He added that China had obstructed India's patrols in contravention of

accords made to avoid skirmishes between their armies, who fought a border war in 1962 and have regularly clashed since.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the Chinese threat to India and Southeast Asia is one of the reasons the United States is reducing its troop presence in Europe.

Pompeo was asked why the US had reduced the number of troops it has based in Germany. Speaking about the Chinese threat, he cited the "bloody border confrontation with India," Beijing's South China Sea activity and its predatory economic policies as evidence.

The actions of the Chinese Communist Party meant there were "threats to India" and countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and the South China Sea. The US military is "postured to meet these challenges of our

appropriately" time", he said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has accused India of trying to distract the attention of its people by expelling Pakistani diplomats after the border clashes.

"Things have deteriorated, things are very delicate," Qureshi told Reuters in an interview at his ministry in Islamabad late on Thursday. Qureshi said he was concerned that India could try to get Pakistan involved in the regional tensions with a "false flag operation" - an incident staged to provide a pretext for action.

LADAKH STAND-OFF

Pompeo says US shifting military to face Chinese threat to India and Southeast Asia

Pakistan condemns India's expulsion of diplomats at 'delicate' time after China clash

'Best of humanity' Indonesian fishermen rescue Rohingyas defying authorities

AGENCIES, AL JAZEERA

Nearly 100 Rohingya people who were stranded off the coast of Indonesia were pulled to shore on Thursday by local people furious at local authorities' refusal to give them shelter because of fears about the coronavirus.

Some 94 people from the persecuted Myanmar minority - including 30 children - were plucked from their boat by fishermen this week before being intercepted by maritime officials from Sumatra island who pulled them closer to shore.

But officials in Lhokseumawe in the Indonesian province of Aceh refused to allow the group to land, citing coronavirus concerns.

Angry locals took matters into their own hands on Thursday by taking to their own boats to pull the group to shore.

Residents who had gathered on a local beach cheered the move, according to an AFP reporter on the scene.

"It's purely for humanitarian reasons," said fisherman Aples Kuari.

"We were sad seeing kids and pregnant women stranded at sea," he added.

Earlier on Thursday, local police chief Eko Hartanto said they wanted to send the mainly Muslim Rohingya back to sea rather than give them temporary shelter.

But authorities appeared to soften that stance in the face of local protests, and the group has now been given temporary shelter in private residences.

The Rohingya would be checked by medical staff to ensure they were virus-free, according to Aceh's rescue agency. Aceh is on the northern tip of Sumatra.

Amnesty International praised the spirit of the rescue. The "disembarkation of Rohingya refugees is a moment of optimism and solidarity," the organisation's Indonesia Executive Director Usman Hamid said in a statement.

"It's a credit to the community in Aceh who pushed hard and took risks so that these children, women and men could be brought to shore. They have shown the best of humanity."

More than one million Rohingya live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, after fleeing their homes in Myanmar in 2017 to escape a brutal military crackdown that is now the subject of an international genocide investigation.

Indonesia and neighbouring Malaysia are the Rohingya's favoured destinations, with thousands paying people smugglers for the dangerous journey across the Indian Ocean every year.

But the Rohingya's plight has been compounded in recent months as officials have turned them away over concern about the coronavirus.



Locals evacuate Rohingya refugees from a boat at a coast of North Aceh, Indonesia, on Thursday.

ASEAN SUMMIT

Malaysia can't take any more Rohingyas: PM

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia can no longer take in Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said yesterday, citing a struggling economy and dwindling resources as a result of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Muslim-majority Malaysia has long been a favoured destination for Rohingya seeking a better life after fleeing a 2017 military-led crackdown in Myanmar and refugee camps in Bangladesh.

But Malaysia, which does not recognise refugee status, has recently turned away boats and detained hundreds of Rohingya, amid rising anger towards foreigners who have been accused of spreading the coronavirus and taking up scarce state funds.

"We can no longer take more as our resources and capacity are already stretched, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic," Muhyiddin said in a teleconference with other leaders of the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), which includes Myanmar.

"Yet, Malaysia is unfairly expected to do more to accommodate incoming refugees."

Muhyiddin urged the UN refugee agency to speed up the resettlement of Rohingya in Malaysia to third countries. The agency says there are more than 100,000 Rohingya in Malaysia though rights groups say the number is higher.

He also called for more efforts to combat the trafficking of Rohingya, who he said were increasingly at risk for exploitation, slavery and recruitment by militants.

Malaysia has stepped up border enforcement patrols as part of its attempt to control the spread of the coronavirus. It has pushed back 22 boats since May 1, HRW said, describing the situation as an echo of the 2015 crisis when thousands of Rohingya were left stranded at sea.



A police officer from the Narcotics Control Board stands guard in front of boxes of confiscated drugs during the 50th Destruction of Confiscated Narcotics ceremony in Ayutthaya province, Thailand, yesterday. Thailand is Southeast Asia's meth 'superhighway', with drugs from remote Myanmar labs pouring through the border destined for the local market or overseas as far as Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

NEWS IN brief

Lightning kills 107 in India

AFP, Patna

At least 107 people died from lightning strikes in northern and eastern India Thursday, officials said, during the early stages of the annual monsoon season. Some 83 people were killed in the impoverished eastern state of Bihar after being struck by lightning, and another 24 died in northern Uttar Pradesh state. Dozens more were injured, officials said.

6-year-old boy dies in J&K crossfire

AFP, Srinagar

A six-year-old boy caught in crossfire was among five people killed in Indian Kashmir yesterday, officials said. New Delhi has bolstered counter-insurgency efforts in the restive territory, with at least 33 separatist militants killed this month. The child was in a car that drove into a gun battle between suspected rebels and paramilitaries near the town of Bijbehara, a police officer told AFP. Tension is running high in Kashmir since August last year when India revoked the region's semi-autonomous status.

First ninja graduate!

AFP, Tokyo

Japan has produced its first ninja studies graduate after Genichi Mitsuhashi spent two years honing his martial arts skills and absorbing the finer traditions of the feudal martial arts agents. The 45-year-old completed the master's course at Mie University in central Japan, the region considered the home of the ninja. The Mie University set up the world's first research centre devoted to the ninja in 2017 and opened a graduate course a year later.

Warnings as virus cases surge globally

US, Europe battle resurgence; India's tally mounts

AFP, Washington

The United States and Europe battled a resurgence of coronavirus cases yesterday, with Texas ordering bars to close and warnings mounting worldwide over lifting lockdowns too soon.

Britons were told to avoid packed beaches while a major Australian city faced a surge in infections that prompted a warning against the hoarding of toilet roll.

But Sweden lashed out at the World Health Organization for listing it among at-risk European countries, in a sign of the sensitivities at play as countries try to manage the pandemic.

More than 489,000 people worldwide have died from Covid-19 since it emerged in China late last year and cases are expected to reach 10 million across the globe within the next week.

Countries have been balancing the need to reopen economies shattered by coronavirus shutdowns with the need to maintain sufficient measures to prevent a feared second wave.

India registered its biggest single-day increase in Covid-19 cases, recording 17,296 infections in the last 24 hours, the health ministry said yesterday morning.

In the US, after hitting a two-month plateau, the rate of new cases is now soaring in southern and western states.

The United States recorded 37,667 cases and 692 deaths in 24 hours, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, with nearly 122,000 lives lost overall -- by far the highest confirmed toll in the world.

In Latin America, Brazil had close to 55,000 deaths and 1.2 million infections, while Mexico on Thursday surpassed 25,000 fatalities.

The World Health Organization warned Thursday that Europe is not yet in the clear, saying 11 nations faced a "very significant resurgence" that could push health systems "to the brink once again."

In Britain, people were urged to abide by social distancing rules after tens of thousands swarmed the seaside resort of Bournemouth during a heatwave.

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