

NEWS IN BRIEF

India to hold election in Bihar amid coronavirus outbreak

India announced local elections involving millions of voters in a densely packed state even as it reported 86,052 new infections of coronavirus on Friday and remained set to overtake the United States by next month as the world's worst-affected nation. The elections in the state of Bihar, with a population roughly the size of Japan, will kick off at the end of October and will be spread over three days, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) told a news conference. Bihar has reported more than 174,000 Covid-19 cases and 878 deaths.

Thousands of mosques in Xinjiang demolished: report

Chinese authorities have demolished thousands of mosques in Xinjiang, an Australian think tank said yesterday, in the latest report of widespread human rights abuses in the restive region. Rights groups say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim Turkic-speaking people have been incarcerated in camps across the northwestern territory, with residents pressured to give up traditional and religious activities. Around 16,000 mosques had been destroyed or damaged, according to an Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) report based on satellite imagery documenting hundreds of sacred sites and statistical modelling. Most of the destruction had taken place in the last three years and an estimated 8,500 mosques had been completely destroyed, the report said.

SP Balasubrahmanyam passes away at 74



Celebrated singer SP Balasubrahmanyam died in a Chennai hospital after almost two months of treatment. He was 74. Balasubrahmanyam had been in hospital with Covid-19 complications since August 5. Tributes poured in as the news came out with Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing their grief while remembering his rich contribution to the country. SP Balasubrahmanyam, winner of six National Awards, leaves behind a vast body of work that spans 40,000 songs in 16 languages. He was also an actor, producer and voice actor. SPB was a recipient of the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan. His funeral will be held on Saturday morning before which a public homage will be allowed.

US protesters defy second night of curfew in Louisville

More than 1,000 people defied a second night of curfew in the US city of Louisville to protest over the lack of criminal charges in the police killing of Breonna Taylor, with some seeking refuge in a church. Two officers were shot during clashes in Louisville a day earlier, after authorities announced a grand jury had decided not to charge anyone in connection with the death of Taylor -- a 26-year-old black woman shot dead in her apartment by police earlier this year. Taylor's death has become a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement and the grand jury decision sent fresh demands for racial justice billowing across the country.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Farmers on tractors shout slogans as they arrive to block the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border during a protest against farm bills passed by India's parliament, in Noida, India, yesterday. The legislation means that farmers no longer have to sell to state-controlled markets at fixed prices, freeing them to supply to any buyer they choose and getting rid of middlemen, but also exposing them to corporate exploitations.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Thai kids revolt against rigid education system

REUTERS, Bangkok

Wearing white ribbons, publicly hacking off their hair and making "Hunger Games" salutes - Thailand's high school students are doing their best to shake up the country's rigid education system.

As university students stage weeks of high-profile campus protests for democracy, their younger brethren are advancing their own rebellion to Thailand's establishment.

"There's a viral saying that 'our first dictatorship is school'," 17-year old Peka Loetparisanyu told Reuters at her apartment. "They are trying instill in us that we are only the little people in an authoritarian society," Loetparisanyu said. "This means that a lot of our rights have been violated."

As well as supporting the broader aims of the anti-government protests, the high school movement is targeted at gaining self-expression for students via the abolition of rules they deem as archaic.

Traditionalism runs through Thailand's education system. The royal anthem is played at morning assemblies, uniform and deportment rules are strict and students are expected to be unquestioning of authority. Critics say the school system is aimed at compliance more than education.

Still, conservatives were furious last month when some students wore white ribbons and raised three-finger "Hunger Games" salutes during the morning anthem recital to support the pro-democracy movement. The salute has been a symbol of calls for democracy since Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha first took power in a 2014 coup. The white ribbons represent the purity of the students.

Fifteen-year-old Benjamaporn Nivas became one of the first faces of the 'Bad Student' movement when she sat in public places with a sign around her neck inviting passersby to cut her hair as symbolic 'punishment' for infringing the haircut rule. She's now set her sights on further reform.

"They should revoke all the outdated rules, not just that one," she told Reuters. "Those rules shouldn't exist in the first place. They violate our human rights."

'I fear the worst'

Guterres warns world is doomed if key actors handle climate crisis like Covid-19 as US, China, Russia clash at UN over pandemic

REUTERS, New York

The United States, China and Russia fought on Thursday during a United Nations Security Council meeting on the coronavirus pandemic after UN chief Antonio Guterres had warned the body that if the climate crisis was approached with the "same disunity and disarray" of COVID-19, then: "I fear the worst."

Guterres said the coronavirus was out of control as the global death toll approaches 1 million, while more than 30 million have been infected. He blamed "a lack of global preparedness, cooperation, unity and solidarity."

"The pandemic is a clear test of international cooperation - a test we have essentially failed," he told the 15-member body.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Chinese government's top diplomat, Wang Yi, both took veiled swipes at the United States during the virtual council meeting on global governance post-Covid-19, to which US Ambassador Kelly Craft responded: "Shame on each of you."

"I am astonished and I am disgusted

by the content of today's discussion ... members of the council who took this opportunity to focus on political grudges rather than the critical issue at hand," she said.

While not naming any countries, Lavrov noted that the pandemic had deepened differences between states.



"We see attempts on the part of individual countries to use the current situation in order to move forward their narrow interests of the moment, in order to settle the score with an undesirable government or geopolitical competitors," he said.

Long-simmering tensions between the United States and China hit the boiling point over the pandemic, spotlighting Beijing's bid for greater

multilateral influence in a challenge to Washington's traditional leadership.

Washington accuses Beijing of a lack of transparency that it says worsened the outbreak. China denies the US assertions. Craft reiterated those accusations on Thursday, echoing a call by Trump for the world body to hold China accountable.

China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun rejected her accusations and said: "Enough is enough. You have created enough troubles for the world already. ... The US should understand that blaming others will not solve its own problems."

The United States has announced plans to leave the Geneva-based World Health Organization after Trump accused it of becoming a puppet for China during the coronavirus pandemic. The WHO has rejected Trump's assertion.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian also appeared to take a stab at the United States when he said the pandemic should not be used to undermine "all the work has been done over recent decades by feminist movements for gender equality."

'Very sorry'

Kim issues rare apology for killing of South Korean

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un yesterday apologised for the shooting death of a South Korean man to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, the South's national security adviser said, as public and political outrage over the killing grew.

Apologies from the North -- let alone attributed to Kim personally -- are extremely unusual, and the message comes with inter-Korean ties in deep freeze as well as a stand-



off in nuclear negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington.

The apology came in a letter from the North's United Front Department, which handles cross-border ties, to South Korean President Moon Jae-in a day after South Korean officials said the North's soldiers killed the man, doused his body in fuel and set it on fire.

The shooting of the man, a fisheries official who had gone missing this week, shocked South Koreans and sparked a barrage of criticism from the opposition and the public, prompting an unusually tough response from Moon, who called it "unpardonable".



A woman holds a placard as Fridays for Future activists protest calling for a "Global Day of Climate Action" in Berlin, Germany, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Democrats prepare bill limiting US SC justice terms to 18 years

REUTERS, New York

Democrats in of the House of Representatives will introduce a bill next week to limit the tenure of U.S. Supreme Court justices to 18 years from current lifetime appointments, in a bid to reduce partisan warring over vacancies and preserve the court's legitimacy.

The new bill, seen by Reuters, would allow every president to nominate two justices per four-year term and comes amid heightened political tensions as Republican President Donald Trump prepares to announce his third pick for the Supreme Court after the death on Sept. 18 of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, with just 40 days to go until the Nov. 3 election.

"It would save the country a lot of agony and help lower the temperature over fights for the court that go to the fault lines of cultural issues and is one of the primary things tearing at our social fabric," said California U.S. Representative Ro Khanna, who plans

to introduce the legislation on Tuesday, along with Representatives Joe Kennedy III of Massachusetts and Don Beyer of Virginia.

Partly due to rising life expectancies, justices serve increasingly long tenures, on average now more than 25 years.

Term limits for high court justices have for years had support from a number of legal scholars on both the right and the left. Several polls in recent years have also shown large majorities of the American public support term limits.

Some legal observers, including those who favor term limits, say they must be accomplished through an amendment to the US Constitution, which has been interpreted as requiring life tenure for federal judges and justices.

The bill seeks to avoid constitutional concerns by exempting current justices from the 18-year rule. Those appointed under term limits would become "senior" upon retirement and rotate to lower courts.

Afghanistan: 65 Taliban militants killed in fighting

AFP, Khost

Afghan security forces have killed 65 Taliban militants during an intense battle in eastern Afghanistan, officials said Thursday, as fighting rages between the two sides despite ongoing peace talks.

The latest bloodshed came late Wednesday after the Taliban stormed a military headquarters building in the Wazi Khwa district of Paktika province.

Bakhtiar Gul Zadrar, the head of Paktika provincial council, confirmed the information. The Taliban did not immediately comment.

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2	477081	08/10/2020	11/10/2020
3	477082	08/10/2020	11/10/2020

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