



Police use water cannon against protesters during an anti-government protest, in Bangkok, yesterday. Inset protesters scuffles with security forces. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Libyan financing: Sarkozy charged with 'conspiracy'

French prosecutors yesterday said that they had slapped criminal conspiracy charges on former president Nicolas Sarkozy over claims he used Libyan cash for his 2007 election campaign. It adds to charges lodged in 2018 of "passive corruption," "benefitting from embezzled public funds" and "illegal campaign financing" for which Sarkozy already faces trial. Prosecutors suspect that Sarkozy and his associates received millions of euros from the regime of former strongman Muammar Gaddafi to help finance his election bid. Sarkozy denies all charges.

European powers condemn Israel settlement approvals

European powers yesterday condemned Israel's decision to approve thousands more settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, calling it a "counterproductive" move that undermines regional peace efforts. "The expansion of settlements violates international law and further imperils the viability of a two-state solution to bring about a just and lasting peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said a joint statement from the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain. The ministers said pushing ahead with more settlements would be a "counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalisation agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain".

New Zealand votes today

New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern yesterday urged voters to deliver her a strong general election mandate, promising a swift recovery from the novel coronavirus pandemic. Ardern's decisive response to the crisis has left her well-placed for today's vote, although recent polls have suggested her Labour Party may need support from the minor Greens Party to form government. Ardern is facing National Party leader Judith Collins as her main opponent.

Cops rescue woman 'locked in toilet for over a year'

A 33-year old woman who was allegedly held captive by her husband in the toilet of their home for over a year has been rescued by protection officers in the north Indian state of Haryana. Videos and images of the incident showed the woman in a dishevelled and malnourished state as she was carried from the rooftop toilet in the city of Panipat on Tuesday. The woman's husband has been booked by the local police on charges of domestic violence and wrongful confinement, but is currently out on bail after a magistrate's court hearing the day after the rescue operation. He denied the accusations, telling that his wife was mentally unstable and opted to be in the toilet at her own will.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Thai PM say he won't quit

Warns protesters against agitation as thousands defy protest ban for 2nd day; two face charges for 'violence against queen'

REUTERS, BANGKOK

Thai police fired stinging liquid from water cannon at thousands of Thai protesters yesterday in the most violent escalation of three months of demonstrations against the government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former junta leader, who refused to bow to pressure.

Protesters, defying a government ban on gatherings for a second day, pushed back against helmeted police who advanced with batons and riot shields.

Youth-led protests have grown into the biggest challenge in years to a political establishment dominated by military figures and the Royal Palace of King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

The king has made no direct comment on the protests, but in comments broadcast on state television, he said Thailand "needs people who love the country and love the monarchy".

Until now, police had not used major force to suppress peaceful protests, although more than 40

demonstrators - including several leaders - have been arrested in the past week.

The government banned political gatherings of more than five people on Thursday.

"I'm not quitting," Prayuth told reporters after an emergency cabinet meeting, adding that emergency measures would be in force for up to 30 days.

Calls have also built up among protesters for reforms to the monarchy, which is accused by protesters of helping to entrench decades of military influence in politics.

Police yesterday said that two men would be charged with attempted violence against the queen, which carries a possible death sentence if her life is thought to have been threatened. Even if not, the charge can mean life in jail.

The office of the United Nations' High Commissioner said it was concerned about the situation in Thailand, especially the application of serious charges, including sedition, against people peacefully exercising their rights.

11m girls risk not returning to school

Says Unesco chief on post-pandemic world

AFP, Kinshasa

Eleven million girls face being unable to return to school even after coronavirus restrictions are lifted around the world, Unesco head Audrey Azoulay said Thursday during a visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We worry that in many countries the closure of schools has unfortunately led to losses," Azoulay said as she visited a high school in the capital Kinshasa, three days after the country's 2020-21 school year began.

"We estimate that 11 million girls will be unable to go back to school around the world."

Accordingly, "we have launched an awareness campaign on the need for schools to go back to school," the former French culture minister said.

Education "unfortunately remains very unequal" for girls, Azoulay said, noting that their access to schooling is a priority for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

Hailing the reform as "very ambitious", Azoulay recognised the "enormous challenges" at hand in terms of infrastructure, teacher training and budgeting.

Urging girls to pursue their schooling "as long as possible", she said she would support the Congolese authorities in the "massive effort that must be made for the quality of teaching".

Experts estimate the annual cost of free primary education at \$2.64 billion, a colossal sum for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As of September 11, total state revenue was no more than \$2.5 billion, according to the Central Bank of Congo.



FIGHT FOR AUTONOMY

Major parties in J&K unite

REUTERS, Srinagar

Kashmir's main political parties announced a grand alliance on Thursday to seek a peaceful restoration of its autonomy after India's release of the last major Kashmiri political leader from lengthy detention.

India revoked the Muslim-majority region's special status last year, imposed harsh curbs on the region to stem protests.

On Tuesday, the government ordered the release of Mehbooba Mufti after a 14-month detention and she and other leaders promptly called for a campaign to restore Kashmir's special rights.

"Our battle is a constitutional battle. We want the government of India to return to the people of the state (of Kashmir) the rights they held before 5th August, 2019," said former Kashmiri chief minister Farooq Abdullah.

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No-deal Brexit?

UK PM cancels talks, says time has come to prepare to leave EU without a trade deal

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said it was now time to prepare for a no-trade deal Brexit unless the European Union fundamentally changed course, bluntly telling Brussels that there was no point in talking any more.

A tumultuous "no deal" finale to the United Kingdom's five-year Brexit crisis would sow chaos through the delicate supply chains that stretch across Britain, the EU and beyond - just as the economic hit from the coronavirus pandemic worsens.

At what was supposed to be the "Brexit summit" yesterday, the EU delivered an ultimatum: it said it was concerned by a lack of progress and called on London to yield on key sticking points or see a rupture of ties with the bloc from Jan 1.

"I have concluded that we should get ready for January 1 with arrangements that are more like Australia's based on simple principles of global free trade," Johnson said.

"With high hearts and with complete



confidence, we will prepare to embrace the alternative and we will prosper mightily as an independent free trading nation, controlling and setting our own laws," he added.

EU heads of government, concluding a summit in Brussels yesterday, rushed to say that they wanted a trade deal and that talks would continue, though not at any price.

Johnson's spokesman said talks were now over and there was no point in the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier coming to London next week barring a change in approach.

After demanding that London make further concessions for a deal, EU diplomats and officials cast Johnson's move as little more than rhetoric, portraying it as a frantic bid to secure concessions before a last-minute deal was done.

While US investment banks agree that a deal is the most likely ultimate outcome, the consensus was wrong on the 2016 Brexit referendum: when Britons voted by 52-48% to leave, markets tumbled and European leaders were shocked.

17 OCTOBER

15th death anniversary of M. A. Samad

You not only founded the first private sector insurance company in Bangladesh but initiated an Industry which today has a family of seventy eight companies in Life and Non-Life Insurance. Though we mourn your absence the industry remembers and recognizes the immense contribution you still continue to make with the books you wrote on insurance for generations taking up this noble profession.

May Allah grant you eternal peace.

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