



A pro-democracy protester uses a loudspeaker to address the crowd and gives the three-finger salute during an anti-government rally at Kaset intersection in Bangkok yesterday, as they continue to defy an emergency decree banning gatherings.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

French police raid Islamist groups after beheading

French police yesterday raided the homes of dozens of suspected Islamist militants three days after the beheading of a teacher who had shown his pupils cartoons deemed inappropriate to Muslims, the interior minister said. The raids came a day after tens of thousands of people took part in rallies countrywide to honour slain teacher Samuel Paty and to defend freedom of expression. Gerald Darmanin said the swoop on Islamist networks was designed to send a message that “enemies of the Republic” would not enjoy “a minute’s respite”. Paty, 47, was murdered on his way home from the school where he taught in a suburb northwest of Paris on Friday afternoon. A photo of the teacher and a message confessing to his murder was found on the mobile phone of his killer, an 18-year-old Chechen man Abdullah Anzorov, who was shot dead by police.

Taiwan, Chinese officials scuffled in Fiji: report

A physical clash between Taiwan and Chinese officials at a diplomatic reception in Fiji left the rival powers trading allegations of assault yesterday. Taipei accused two Chinese officials of gatecrashing an event at the luxurious Grand Pacific Hotel in the Fijian capital Suva on October 8 and assaulting an employee, putting him in hospital. The Chinese embassy in Fiji confirmed its officials were in “public area outside the function venue” on unspecified “official duties” on the day of the incident. But the Chinese embassy claimed the Taiwanese mission’s staff “acted provocatively” and caused “injuries and damage to one Chinese diplomat”. Both sides said they had asked the Fijian police and other island authorities to investigate. A Fiji police spokeswoman told AFP the probe was ongoing and its officers were working on the issue with the Pacific nation’s foreign affairs ministry. She declined to provide further details. China regards democratic Taiwan as a rebel province and has vowed to one day seize the self-ruled island.

New fighting over Karabakh

A new ceasefire agreed between Armenia and Azerbaijan to halt fighting over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh was again failing to hold yesterday as both sides accused each other of fresh attacks. The truce, backed by international mediators to put a stop to three weeks of fighting that has left hundreds dead, was supposed to have come into force at midnight Sunday but both sides immediately accused each other of violating the deal. UN chief Antonio Guterres on Sunday called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to “fully abide” by the new ceasefire, his spokesman said. The clashes over Karabakh that erupted on September 27 have left more than 700 dead, according to official tolls, but the real number may be much higher.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

PM vows to protect monarchy

Calls parliament session; probe launched against media over protest coverage

AGENCIES

Thailand’s embattled premier yesterday vowed to protect monarchy and called for a special session of parliament as protesters planned more rallies to demand his resignation, the release of jailed activists, and reforms to the monarchy.

Tens of thousands of mostly young protesters have taken to the streets in the past week in defiance of an emergency decree banning gatherings of more than four people.

Police said around 20,000 people protested across the capital Sunday, although activists and local media estimated much bigger crowds.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha yesterday said parliament – currently in recess – would be recalled to discuss how to reduce tensions. “We support opening an extraordinary session to solve this conflict,” he told reporters, warning protesters not to break the law.

“The thing the government must do is to protect the monarchy. This is the duty for all Thai citizens to perform,” Prayut continued.

THAI DEMOCRACY PROTESTS



“I would call for peaceful protests, the government has reasonably given in. We are avoiding using force as much as we can.

The largely leaderless movement is calling for the resignation of Prayut – a former army chief and mastermind of a 2014 coup – as well as the re-writing of the military-drafted constitution they say rigged last year’s election in his favour.

Most controversially, protesters are also making unprecedented demands to reform the powerful and ultra-wealthy monarchy. They want the abolition of a draconian

defamation law that shields King Maha Vajiralongkorn from criticism, greater transparency of royal finances, and for the monarch to stay out of politics.

Prayuth has said he will not quit. The movement appeared to be gaining traction across the country with smaller protests taking place Sunday from Phuket in the south to Khon Kaen in the northeast.

Apart from arrests by police, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society said it had flagged more than 325,000 messages on social media platforms that violated the Computer Crimes Act, which critics say is used to muzzle dissent.

Thai police yesterday said they had ordered an investigation of four news outlets under emergency measures introduced last week and imposed curbs on messaging app Telegram to try to stop protests.

By midday, #SaveFreePress was the latest hashtag trending on Thai Twitter, one of several platforms being used by tech-savvy protesters to coordinate their activity.

TENSIONS ALONG LAC

India buys high altitude warfare kits from US

Chinese soldier detained in Ladakh

AGENCIES

As the tensions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at the eastern Ladakh ages for months with no sign of dissolution, the Indian side has bought high altitude warfare kits from the US on an urgent basis, reports suggest citing officials with the knowledge of the matter.

The step could be significant as the area of tension is very well known for its bone-chilling temperature and war at such place is dangerous.

The Indian Army used an agreement which allows the two militaries to take logistical assistance from each other such as buying fuel and spare parts for warships and aircraft, for the transaction, The Statesman reported citing the officials, who opted to remain anonymous.

Both sides have poured tens of thousands of troops into the border zone since fighting a pitched battle in June in which 20 Indian troops and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were killed.

Meanwhile, India yesterday said that it had detained a Chinese soldier who strayed across the disputed frontier. The People’s Liberation Army corporal was “apprehended” in the high altitude freezing desert area of Ladakh after crossing into Indian-controlled territory along their poorly demarcated border, an Indian army statement said.

India named the Chinese soldier who “strayed” as Corporal Wang Ya Long and said he had been given medical treatment against the extreme climate. India said the PLA had already made an approach and the corporal would be returned “as per established protocols”.

Several rounds of talks have failed to significantly ease tensions and the neighbours -- who blame each other for the standoff -- are now digging in for a harsh winter at 4,200 metres in a region where temperatures regularly fall below minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 Fahrenheit).



Riot police clash with demonstrators during a protest against Chile’s government in Santiago, Chile, on Sunday. Two churches were torched as tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered Sunday in a central Santiago square to mark the anniversary of a protest movement that broke out last year demanding greater equality in Chile. The demonstration comes just a week before Chileans vote in a referendum on whether to replace the dictatorship-era constitution -- one of the key demands when the protest movement began in October 2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump risks losing Rust Belt counties

In 2016, he won these on the economy, in 2020, he might lose them over coronavirus

REUTERS

Tanya Wojciak, a lifelong Republican and suburban mom from northeast Ohio, is the kind of battleground state voter President Donald Trump can’t afford to lose - but already has.

She is angry at Trump’s handling of the novel coronavirus crisis that has killed more than 219,000 Americans, the largest death toll of any country. She lost a friend to Covid-19 in April.

Wojciak, 39, said Trump’s spotty use of masks and repeated attempts to downplay the seriousness of the coronavirus - even after being hospitalized for it himself - is “not presidential at all.” She said she regrets voting for him four years ago. A hand-painted Biden sign now graces her front lawn in Cortland.

Some 547 km east, in Bangor, Pennsylvania, Leo Bongiorno says he, too, is voting for Biden after sitting out the 2016 contest.

Customers at Bongiorno’s brewery and eatery, Bangor Trust Brewing, remained scarce even after Pennsylvania began to ease its bar-and-restaurant restrictions in June. Daily Covid-19 infections in the state reached their highest totals since mid-April this month, and Bongiorno says many of his regulars are too nervous to go to bars.



The federal relief loan he received was less than he would have made collecting unemployment checks, and the brewery’s monthly bills dwarf sales. He said the country needs a president who understands what small businesses need to survive a pandemic - and that isn’t Trump.

Rust Belt battleground states including Ohio and Pennsylvania handed Trump the White House in 2016, and they will again help decide the Nov 3 election. Four years ago, Trump’s

message of economic revitalization won votes from many white, working-class voters who had cast ballots for Democrat Barack Obama in 2012.

Many of those voters remain loyal to the president. Still, support for Trump is slipping in these states this year, and the pandemic is a big reason why. Reuters/Ipsos polling, conducted Oct. 9-13, showed 50% of likely voters nationwide feel Biden would be better at managing the pandemic response, compared to 37% for Trump.

Opinion polling in the battleground states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin shows that voters there, too, think Biden is the better candidate to lead on the coronavirus.

In 2016, many residents in these states liked Trump’s protectionist trade philosophy, strong defense of gun rights and hard-line stance on immigration. Now some have had enough.

The Biden campaign has also have made major inroads among older voters, who are afraid of the virus. Trump won the 55-plus age group by 13 percentage points in 2016. The two candidates now split American voters aged 55 years and older almost evenly: 47% say they will vote for Biden, while 46% back Trump.

Pak anti-govt protest gathers steam

Opposition alliance accuses govt of plotting to divide it after mass rally demands PM Khan to go

AGENCIES

Pakistan opposition parties yesterday accused the Prime Minister Imran Khan led government of plotting to divide their unity by dirty politics, a day after tens of thousands of opposition supporters rallied in Karachi as part of a campaign to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan, who they accuse of being installed by the military in a rigged election two years ago.

The mass demonstration in Karachi was the second in three days launched by Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), formed last month by nine major opposition parties to begin a nationwide agitation against the government.

Under Khan, Pakistan has experienced mounting censorship of the media and a crackdown on dissent, critics and opposition. But the campaign against him sought to tap into discontent over his handling of the economy, which was tanking even before the global coronavirus pandemic struck.

“You’ve snatched jobs from people. You have snatched two-time a day food from the people,” Maryam Nawaz, the daughter and political heir of the former three-time premier Nawaz Sharif, told the rally.

In the early hours yesterday, police arrested her husband Muhammad Safdar following complaints from Khan’s Pakistan

Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party that he had raised political slogans at the mausoleum of Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, an action deemed illegal.

“Police broke my room door at the hotel I was staying at in Karachi and arrested Capt. Safdar,” Nawaz tweeted yesterday morning. A spokesman of the provincial government said police had not acted on their orders.

Maryam Nawaz, also PML-N’s vice-president, and JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman claimed that Safdar was arrested with the aim of dividing the opposition’s anti-government alliance.

During Sunday’s rally she had shared the platform with Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the PPP president whose party governs Karachi.

“Our farmers have hunger in their homes... our youth is disappointed,” said Zardari.

The message struck a chord with their supporters, in a country now suffering double digit inflation and negative economic growth.

On Friday, the opposition held a mass rally in Punjab, a stronghold for Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League (N). Addressing the rally via video link from London, Nawaz Sharif accused army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa of rigging the 2018 elections and orchestrating his ouster in 2017, saying the corruption charges brought against him were concocted.

Insurgents kidnap NLD candidates in Rakhine

REUTERS, Yangon

Insurgents from western Myanmar yesterday claimed responsibility for the kidnapping last week of three ruling party candidates in conflict-torn Rakhine state, and demanded the release of detained student protesters in return for letting them go.

The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) said the three – two women and a man – were abducted on Wednesday while campaigning in Rakhine before a Nov 8 election.

The western region, where most parliamentary seats are held by Rakhine nationalist opponents of Myanmar’s leader Aung San Suu Kyi, has been beset by an insurgency that has intensified this year.

The Arakan Army (AA), the rebel group battling government troops there, said in a statement posted online the three candidates would be “detained and investigated as required by circumstances till a certain time”.

It accused the NLD of complicity with military “atrocities” against civilians but said it was willing to free the group in return for the release of students arrested while protesting the war and other “innocent people” detained by authorities.

The country’s election committee said on Saturday more than half the polling stations initially planned in Rakhine will no longer operate, as parts of the state are too unstable for voting.

POST-BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS

UK, EU mull how to break deadlock following threats

AFP, London

Britain and the European Union held fresh meetings yesterday to try to unlock their Brexit impasse after London threatened to walk out and go its own way next year despite warnings of further damage to the Covid-hit economy.

The UK government launched an information campaign advising businesses that “time is running out” to be ready for a complex new trading chapter with a post-Brexit transition period expiring at the end of this year, deal or no deal.

But industry groups continue to warn of potential chaos for road hauliers and the possibility of drugs shortages, as vital preparations remain in the early stages ahead of Britain unwinding nearly five decades of European integration.

Senior minister Michael Gove said Sunday the door remained “ajar” for an overarching trade deal to remove much of the uncertainty if the EU shifts position,

despite Prime Minister Boris Johnson declaring last week he was ready to abandon talks.

Gove met European Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic in London yesterday morning to discuss the two sides’ existing divorce treaty, which Britain has threatened to redraw through a new internal market bill to regulate post-Brexit trade within the UK.

The contentious law has passed Britain’s House of Commons and was due later yesterday to come up for debate in the upper chamber, the House of Lords.

The two sides disagree on state subsidies, how rules on fair competition will be policed and how much access EU fishing fleets will get to UK waters.

Failure to strike a deal would see Britain and Europe revert to World Trade Organization terms, with tariffs and quotas for businesses, potentially devastating for economies already weakened by the pandemic.