

NEWSIN brief

Darjeeling strike ends after 104 days

AFP, Kolkata

A strike that shut down India's picturesque hill station of Darjeeling – causing violence and disruption to tourism – was called off yesterday after 104 days.

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), a movement demanding the formation of a separate Indian state, said it would enter into talks with the government.

Pak court indicts FM on graft charges

AP, Islamabad

A Pakistani court in a high-profile corruption case has indicted the finance minister on graft charges after investigators found his assets did not match his reported income. Media report that Ishaq Dar was present in the courtroom yesterday when a judge read the charges against him. Dar denied allegations.

Catalans 'will vote' on October 1: minister

AFP, Barcelona

Catalans will vote in an independence referendum, regional foreign minister Raul Romeva said Tuesday, despite a crackdown by authorities who want to prevent a vote deemed unconstitutional by the courts. "People will go out and vote on Sunday," said Romeva.

Attack on Mexico drug rehab center kills 14

AFP, Ciudad Juarez

At least 14 people were killed and 8 injured Tuesday night in northern Mexico when an armed group opened fire in a drug addiction rehabilitation center, local police said.

The past decade at least half a dozen attacks have taken place in rehabilitation centers, and according to authorities, are generally perpetrated by gang members settling scores with rivals living in the centers.



Russia destroys last chemical weapons

Putin announces move; watchdog hails 'major milestone'

AFP, Moscow

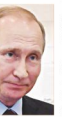
The world's global chemical weapons watchdog hailed the move as a 'major milestone'.

The completion of the verified destruction of Russia's chemical weapons programme is a major milestone in the achievement of the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention," said Ahmet Uzumcu, head of the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

He also praised Russian officials for "their professionalism and dedication", adding experts from the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organisation had "verified the destruction."

The last of the Russian arsenal was 'destroyed at the Kizner chemical weapons destruction facility in the Udmurt Republic', the OPCW said.

Some 96 percent of all the world's declared stockpile of chemical weapons have now been destroyed, the OPCW added.



Force not preferred option

Says Trump after war of words, keeps military option open

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump warned North Korea that any US military option would be "devastating" for Pyongyang, but said the use of force was not Washington's first option to deal with the country's ballistic and nuclear weapons program.

"We are totally prepared for the second option, not a preferred option," Trump said at a White House news conference, referring to military force. "But if we take that option, it will be devastating. I can tell you that, devastating for North Korea. That's called the military option. If we have to take it, we will."

Bellicose statements by Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in recent weeks have created fears that a miscalculation could lead to action with untold ramifications, particularly since Pyongyang conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept 3.

Despite the increased tension, the United States has not detected any change in North Korea's military posture reflecting an increased threat, the top US military officer said on Tuesday.

The assessment by Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, about Pyongyang's military stance was in contrast to a South

TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA
No change in Pyongyang's military posture: US general
Washington imposes sanctions on 26 people

Korean lawmaker who said Pyongyang had boosted defenses on its coast.

"While the political space is clearly very charged right now, we haven't seen a change in the posture of North Korean forces, and we watch that very closely," Dunford told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on his reappointment to his post.

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho on Monday accused Trump of declaring war on the North and threatened that Pyongyang would shoot down US warplanes flying near the Korean Peninsula after American bombers flew close to it last Saturday. Ri was reacting to Trump's Twitter comments that Kim and Ri "won't be around much longer" if they acted on their threats toward the United States.

The United States has imposed sanctions on 26 people as part of its non-proliferation designations for North Korea and nine banks, including some with ties to China, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control Sanctions said on Tuesday.

The US sanctions target people in North Korea and some North Korean nationals in China, Russia, Libya and Dubai, according to a list posted on the agency's website.

Palestinians get place in Interpol

AFP, Beijing

Interpol on Wednesday approved the Palestinian Authority's membership bid, a new victory in its drive for international representation despite strong Israeli opposition.

Israel lobbies hard against Palestinian efforts to join global organisations to advance their goal of statehood. It claimed victory last year when the Palestinian bid to join the global police body was suspended.

Interpol approved the Palestinian application along with a bid by the Solomon Islands during its annual general assembly in Beijing.

"New member countries State of Palestine and Solomon Islands bring INTERPOL's membership to 192," it said on its Twitter account.

It did not detail the voting but candidates require the approval of a two-thirds majority of countries present at the general assembly, excluding abstentions.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation's negotiations affairs department said on Twitter they had received more than 75 percent of the vote.

Israel's foreign ministry did not immediately comment. Palestine gained observer status at the United Nations in 2012 and since then has joined more than 50 international organisations and agreements, according to the Palestinian foreign ministry.



Ugandan opposition lawmakers fight with plain-clothes security personnel in the parliament while protesting a proposed age limit amendment bill debate to change the constitution for the extension of the president's rule, in Kampala, Uganda, yesterday.

REFUGEE CRISIS

EU plans to take 50,000 from Africa, Mideast

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday unveiled plans to take at least 50,000 refugees directly from Africa, the Middle East and Turkey to discourage migrant boats from making the risky Mediterranean crossing.

The proposal involves admitting refugees to European Union countries over the next two years under the bloc's resettlement programme, which was introduced during the migration crisis that hit the continent in 2015.

"We need to open real alternatives to taking perilous irregular journeys," European Union Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos told a news conference in Brussels.

The European Commission said in a statement that it was "recommending a new EU resettlement scheme to bring at least 50,000 of the most vulnerable persons in need of international protection to Europe over the next two years".

US, Nato renew Afghan commitment

Rocket hits airport as Mattis flies in

AFP, Kabul

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg renewed the commitment to Afghanistan yesterday, as insurgents fired rockets that killed one person and wounded four in Kabul.

Mattis is the first member of US President Donald Trump's cabinet to visit the country since Trump pledged to stay the course in America's longest war.

In a sign of the nation's continuing uncertainty of rockets landed on a house near Kabul international airport hours after Mattis flew in, the interior ministry said.

Taliban said they targeted the US and Nato chief's plane. The Islamic State's local Khurasan province's affiliate also claimed responsibility, as security forces were locked in a stand-off with the attackers.

At a joint news conference with President Ashraf Ghani at the presidential palace in Kabul, Mattis and Stoltenberg pledged the support of US and Nato allies to the Afghan conflict, and expressed determination to stop the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorists.

"We will not abandon Afghanistan to a merciless enemy trying to kill its way to power," Mattis told reporters. October marks the 16th anniversary of the start of the war.

CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE OVER RICE SUBSIDY SCHEME

Fugitive former Thai PM gets 5 yrs' jail in absentia

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's top court yesterday sentenced ousted premier Yingluck Shinawatra in absentia to five years in prison for criminal negligence, a verdict that likely ends the political career of a popular leader who fled the junta-run kingdom last month.

Yingluck's administration was toppled in a 2014 coup and she was later put on trial for failing to stop corruption and losses in her government's rice subsidy scheme, which the court said cost the country billions of dollars.

She pleaded innocent and accused the ruling junta of a political witch-hunt. But the Supreme Court in Bangkok deemed her guilty, saying she failed to stop graft and losses in the rice programme.



ATTACK ON ROHINGYAS

Sri Lanka slams 'animal' monks

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan government yesterday slammed a group of radical Buddhist monks who attacked Rohingya refugees on the island as "animals", pledging action against police who failed to protect them.

Rajitha Senarathne, a cabinet spokesman, said the government condemned Tuesday's storming of a UN safe house where 31 Rohingya refugees, including 16 children and seven women, had been given shelter.

UK Labour 'ready for govt': Corbyn

AFP, Brighton

Britain's main opposition Labour party is "now the political mainstream" and "ready for government", leader Jeremy Corbyn said yesterday following unexpected advances in a June general election.

Labour was "on the threshold of power," Corbyn told the party's annual conference in Brighton, the first since the election in which Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May lost her parliamentary majority.

"We've become a government in waiting," he said, adding that Labour were "ready to build a new and progressive relationship with Europe".

Corbyn has met with significant resistance from Labour MPs over his attempts to move the party to the left since he defected to Labour in September 2015.

