

NEWS IN brief

Trump son-in-law gets security clearance back

REUTERS, New York

Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to President Donald Trump and his son-in-law, has had his security clearance restored, allowing him access to classified information after losing the privilege in the fallout over a fired White House aide, his lawyer said on Wednesday.

US state dept expels 2 Venezuelan envoys

REUTERS, Washington

The US State Department said on Wednesday it has ordered two Venezuelan diplomats to leave the United States within 48 hours, a move that follows Venezuela's decision to expel two American diplomats. The envoys are the chargé d'affaires of the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC, and the deputy consul general of the Venezuelan consulate in Houston.

Four killed, 15 injured in Baghdad bomb blast

REUTERS, Baghdad

At least four people were killed and 15 wounded in a suicide attack in Iraq's capital Baghdad yesterday, a military spokesman told Reuters. The attack took place in the predominantly Shia Shula district, in northwest Baghdad. The attacker detonated an explosive vest after he was besieged by security forces at the entrance to the Saqlawiyah park, resulting in the death and injury of "a number of civilians."

Nipah virus claims 4th family member in India

AFP, New Delhi

A fourth member of the same Indian family has died from the rare Nipah virus, officials said yesterday, as authorities scramble to contain an outbreak that has claimed 11 lives. V Moosa, who died yesterday in a hospital in the southwest state of Kerala, had two sons and a sister-in-law succumb to the same deadly infection spread by fruit bats last week.



Indian members of the Darvida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) political party and opposition groups clashes with police during a protest against a copper plant in Tuticorin city, Tamil Nadu yesterday.

ANTI-POLLUTION PROTESTS

Indian city tense as toll rises to 13

AFF, Tuticorin

A protester shot during demonstrations against a copper plant in southern India died of his injuries yesterday, officials said, the 13th victim killed by police fire.

A curfew remained in pockets of Tuticorin city in Tamil Nadu state where police used live ammunition to disperse protesters this week, provoking international outrage and demands for an immediate investigation.

Calls demanding the closure of the copper smelting plant owned by British mining giant Vedanta Resources had been building in recent months, with residents complaining it was polluting their city.

The resistance came to a head Tuesday when police stopped a crowd of thousands from protesting outside the factory.

Cars and buildings were set ablaze and rocks hurled at police, who responded with live fire. Eleven demonstrators were shot dead and many people injured in the melee, including 20 police.

Another protester died Wednesday when he was struck by rubber bullets in a second day of protests.

The latest victim died in hospital yesterday, two days after being injured, doctors said.

The chief minister of Tamil Nadu has ordered an inquiry but defended the actions of police, which the state's opposition leader called "mass murder".

The company has sought to renew the licence of the temporarily non-operational plant and hopes to double its production capacity.

But a state court Wednesday ordered that it cease any further construction at the new site.

Ex-PM quizzed again

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian premier Najib Razak completed his statement to anti-graft agents yesterday, as the Southeast Asian country's new government revealed some \$50 billion of liabilities adding to debt left behind by Najib's scandal-hit administration.

Defeated at the polls two weeks ago, Najib was summoned to explain suspicious transfers of \$10.6 million into his bank account, just a fraction of billions of dollars that went missing from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), a state fund that he had founded during almost a decade in power.

The new government led by 92-year-old Mahathir Mohamad has vowed to find out where the 1MDB money went and punish those responsible.

Najib has denied wrongdoing, though the new head of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) this week described how an investigation into 1MDB had been suppressed three years ago to stop charges being brought against him.

Najib, 64, appeared relaxed as he


left the MACC headquarters some seven hours after arriving. Smiling, he put a finger to his lips to shush journalists so that he could speak.

"I have answered all questions as best as I could, and MACC has carried out their duties well and professionally," Najib said, almost exactly what he said after his first visit to the agency two days earlier.

MALAYSIA 1MDB SCANDAL

Initial focus on \$10.6m into Najib's account

Anti-graft agents meet Swiss whistleblower



He said the MACC had told him the "statement-session" was over.

Malaysians are now wondering if charges will be filed. The new government has barred Najib and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, from leaving the country.

While Najib was giving his statement, agents also met Xavier Justo, a Swiss national who was the first whistleblower in the 1MDB affair. Journalists

saw Justo in the MACC lobby half an hour before Najib arrived.

Najib's statement relates to the transfers of 42 million ringgit (\$10.6 million) into his bank account that investigators tracked back to SRC International, a former unit of 1MDB.

Mahathir met Justo on Sunday. It was documents leaked by the former director of energy group PetroSaudi International, which ran an energy joint venture with 1MDB from 2009 to 2012 that triggered investigations in at least six countries.

Mahathir quit as prime minister in 2003 after leading Malaysia for 22 years, but came out of retirement to join the opposition after becoming convinced that Najib, his former protégé, was corrupt.

Investigators have searched Najib's home and several properties, seizing cash, jewellery and luxury items estimated to be worth millions of dollars.

The Star newspaper reported yesterday that the cash found totalled 130 million ringgit (nearly \$33 million).

Mahathir has also accused Najib's government of understating the national debt and blamed it for abuses that have caused debt to balloon.

Pak ex-PM says intel chief asked him to resign in 2014

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday accused a former intelligence chief of asking him to resign during opposition protests in 2014, comments likely to further fray tense civil-military relations ahead of general elections.

Sharif's allegations, made in court documents before the three-time premier read them to a news conference, were a rare explicit accusation by the veteran leader of political meddling by the military.

In other thinly-veiled remarks aimed at the military, Sharif, who was ousted by the Supreme Court in July, also suggested he was removed from office over his foreign policy stance and refusal to drop a treason case against former army dictator Pervez Musharraf.

Sharif said the 2014 protests organised by opposition figure Imran Khan, which paralysed capital Islamabad for several months, were designed to send him a message that no good would come from pursuing the

Musharraf case.

"Those days, a message was sent to me from the chief of an intelligence agency that I should resign, and if that is not possible, I should go on a long leave," Sharif said, without identifying either.

"The demand for my resignation or going on long leave was based on this impression that if Nawaz Sharif was removed from the way it wouldn't be difficult to wrap up the case against Musharraf."

Pakistan has a host of intelligence agencies but in the past the military-run Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency has most often been accused of election meddling.

The military, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment, has denied it is behind any political interference in the run-up to the general election expected in July.

In March, the army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, told a group of journalists the military was a neutral institution and was only concerned with protecting other institutions, according to media leaks of Bajwa's comments.



China protects rights

Says Premier Li when asked about house arrest of Nobel winner's widow Liu Xia

REUTERS, Beijing

Premier Li Keqiang said yesterday China's constitution protects human rights after he was asked about Liu Xia, the widow of Nobel Peace Prize-winner Liu Xiaobo, with concern growing that Beijing will not allow her to leave the country.

Liu Xia, an artist and poet who suffers from depression, has been under effective house arrest since her husband was awarded the prize in 2010. She has never been charged with any crime.

Liu Xiaobo died of liver cancer in July while in Chinese custody, having been jailed in 2009 for inciting subversion.

Li answered a question about Liu Xia's freedom by saying China's constitution states that it respects and protects human rights. He said at a joint briefing with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Beijing he hoped China and Germany could talk about individual human rights cases on

an equal basis.

"China will respect the actions taken in accordance with the law by judicial and law enforcement bodies, but at the same time we must respect humanitarianism and follow humanitarian principles," Li said.

"On relevant individual cases, we hope to have dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and equality. We will explain our situation," Li said, without elaborating or mentioning Liu Xia by name.

Merkel had brought up human rights issues with him and China was willing to hold talks on the subject with Germany by the end of this year, he said.

China has repeatedly said Liu Xia is free and is accorded all rights guaranteed to her by Chinese law.

However, Beijing-based Western diplomats say she has been closely monitored by Chinese authorities since her husband's death and has only been able to meet and speak to friends and family in pre-arranged phone calls and visits.



Mourners carry the body of Palestinian Oday Khalil, 16, who died of wounds he sustained during clashes with Israeli troops, at his funeral near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

POST POLLS LEBANON

Hariri on track to become PM for third time

REUTERS, Beirut

Lebanon's Saad al-Hariri is on track to become prime minister for a third time after winning the backing of a majority of MPs in official consultations yesterday, and is expected to launch negotiations on a coalition government.

The post of prime minister is reserved for a Sunni Muslim in Lebanon's sectarian power sharing system, and the Western-backed Hariri was the clear frontrunner as the country's leading Sunni despite losing more than a third of his MPs in a May 6 election.

President Michel Aoun was holding the official consultations with MPs who were holding separate meetings with him yesterday. The meetings are due to con-



GLOBAL WARMING THREATS

Families from 8 nations sue EU

AFP, Paris

Ten families from Europe, Kenya, and Fiji have filed suit against the European Union over global warming threats to their homes and livelihoods, their lawyers said yesterday.

They insist the bloc must do more to limit climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions, and point to drought, glacier melt, sea level rise and flooding that will worsen as temperatures rise.

The plaintiffs before the European Court of Justice are "families living near the coast, families owning forests in Portugal, families in the mountains that see the glaciers melting, families in the north that are affected by permafrost melting," their lawyer Roda Verheyen told AFP.

They "are already being impacted by climate change, already incurring damage... and they are saying: 'EU, you have to do what you can to protect us because otherwise our damage will be catastrophic'," Verheyen said.

The claim, nicknamed the "People's Climate Case", is the first of its kind brought against the EU, the group's lawyers said.

Previously, suits were filed in a bid to pressure individual governments to take tougher climate action.

In Paris in 2015, the world's nations agreed to limit average global warming to under two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

INDUS WATERS TREATY DISPUTE

Pak media talks of Indian lobby at World Bank

TOI, New Delhi

Pakistan's complaint to the World Bank about alleged Indian violations of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was frustrated by the South Asian department of the World Bank which is "under the influence of the Indian lobby," said Pakistani media outlet The Express Tribune yesterday.

The country's media yesterday also reported that the World Bank yesterday announced that two days of talks with a Pakistani delegation did not lead to an agreement on the way forward in Pakistan's water dispute with India. The dispute was regarding India commencing the 330-megawatt Kishanganga hydropower station in Jammu and Kashmir. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the project on May 19.

"The disagreement serves a serious blow to Pakistan that remains unable to penetrate in the World Bank, which is under heavy influence of the Indian lobby working in Washington," wrote the Tribune. It further said that "over the years, successive governments (have) kept a blind eye over a growing Indian influence in international financial institutions."

Pakistan says India has violated the 1960 IWT with the World Bank with the Kishanganga project. New Delhi believes that IWT allows it to build "run-of-river" hydel projects that do not change the course of the river and do not deplete the water level downstream. Islamabad argues that the Kishanganga project not only violates the course of the river but also depletes its water level.



Taiwan FM resigns as Burkina cuts ties

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu yesterday tendered his resignation after Burkina Faso announced it was breaking diplomatic ties with the island.

"As a government official, I must be responsible for policies, and I have verbally tendered my resignation to the president," Wu told a press conference.

Wu added that Taipei was cutting relations with Burkina Faso "to safeguard our sovereignty and dignity" and halting bilateral aid and cooperation programmes.

Burkina Faso is the second country to dump Taiwan within weeks after after Dominican Republic switched recognition to Beijing earlier this month, leaving the island with only 18 diplomatic allies around the world.

The move also left Taiwan with only one ally in Africa -- eSwatini (formerly Swaziland). It was the fourth ally Taiwan lost since President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016.

It was not immediately clear if Burkina Faso and China would establish diplomatic relations but Wu said it would only be "sooner or later" and that "everyone knows China is the only factor".

"Why China choose now to steal our ally, everyone can see although we couldn't go into the WHA (World Health Assembly), but we are developing deeper relations with more and more like-minded countries. I believe China can see this," he said.

tinued into the afternoon. Aoun must designate the candidate with the greatest backing.

The new coalition government is expected to reflect the enhanced political position of the Iran-backed Shia group Hezbollah and allies that support its possession of arms, which together won at least 70 of parliament's 128 seats.

While Hariri won wide backing, Hezbollah MPs named nobody for the post. The group would cooperate "positively" with whoever was designated, Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, said after meeting Aoun.