

Blast at China chemical plant kills 19

AFP, Beijing
An explosion at a chemical plant in southwest China left 19 dead and injured another 12, authorities said yesterday, the latest industrial accident in a country where lax regulations often lead to tragedy.
The blast occurred at 6:30 pm Thursday night at an industrial park in Sichuan province's Yibin city, according to a statement on the website of the local work safety administration.
The injured had been taken to hospital and were in stable condition, county officials said, adding that the resulting fire had been put out.
Photos on a local news site showed what appeared to be the burned out shell of a building surrounded by rubble.
The company that owns the building where the fire occurred is a chemical manufacturer named Hengda, according to the official Xinhua news service.



Ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam sit on a Lahore-bound flight due for departure, at Abu Dhabi International Airport, UAE, yesterday. Inset, Supporters of Nawaz Sharif march towards the Lahore airport.

SHARIFS DRAMATIC HOMECOMING

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam, sentenced to jail for corruption, were arrested within minutes of landing at Lahore airport. They are expected to be flown to Rawalpindi. Over 10,000 policemen are posted in the city to check against any trouble or show of strength by supporters for the homecoming of the three-time prime minister, who wants to mobilise his party ahead of elections on July 25. The administration has ordered that mobile phones will be shut in the city from 3 pm to 12 am.

The Sharifs were taken into custody by teams of the National Accountability Bureau and are being flown to Rawalpindi by helicopter. A journalist flying with him alleged that he was confined to the first class lounge at the Abu Dhabi airport and not allowed to contact his lawyer or the media the whole time.

The government is seen to be taking all possible steps to prevent Nawaz Sharif from drawing political capital from his return and arrest. Around 300 members of Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, or PML-N were arrested and several were stopped from heading to the airport.

Pakistan's media regulator has ordered television channels to stop live telecast of briefings of political leaders containing "defamatory and derogatory content". The regulator claimed that "malicious and indecent content" was being aired live by television channels and sought only telecast of edited footage.

Pakistan's third major political movement, the Pakistan Peoples Party, joined the criticism of the crackdown, with its prime ministerial candidate Bilawal Bhutto Zardari questioning why Sharif's supporters would be prevented from gathering.

Nawaz Sharif, 68, was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a Pakistani accountability court for corrupt practices linked to his family's purchase of four London flats. He faces two more corruption cases against him following the Panama Paper scandal.

Sharif alleges the military is aiding a "judicial witch-hunt" against him and his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. The party's past five years in power has been punctuated by the civil-military discord that has plagued Pakistan since its inception.

Their return could shake up an election race marred by accusations Pakistan's powerful military is working behind the scenes to skew the contest in favour of ex-cricketer hero Imran Khan, who describes Sharif as a "criminal" who deserves no support.

His daughter Maryam Nawaz, 44, was also convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. Before leaving London, she called going back to Pakistan "to go to prison the most difficult decision of our lives because my mother is on the ventilator and we don't know what happens next, there is no pain like that of leaving your mother behind in such situation but there's a national duty and we must make this important journey".
A photo of Nawaz Sharif saying goodbye to his wife in hospital was tweeted by many of his supporters. One tweet described it as a picture that "will haunt many in future".



SOURCE: NDTV, DAWN

'I'm quietly confident'

Imran Khan rejects allegation that military helping his campaign, believes stage is set for him to be PM

REUTERS, Lahore
Pakistani cricket legend Imran Khan said he was "quietly confident" of victory in a general election this month and that as prime minister, he would drive an anti-corruption and anti-poverty campaign in the south Asian nation.
The 65-year-old opposition leader, a glamorous part of the London upper crust in his younger days, also dismissed allegations that the powerful military was working behind the scenes to favour his campaign for the July 25 poll.
Oxford-educated Khan spoke in an interview yesterday as his arch foe, ousted former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was due to return to the country and be arrested on a conviction that was handed down by an anti-graft court last week. Much of the eastern city of Lahore, the hometown of both Khan and Sharif, was on alert for protests by Sharif's supporters.
Khan is campaigning hard on populist promises of a prosperous Pakistan that breaks away from its persistent legacy of corruption, even as he expands appeals to nationalist and religious sentiment in the nuclear-armed, Muslim nation.
As prime minister, he says he will partially model his promised anti-corruption campaign and poverty reduction programmes on China, Pakistan's traditional ally that has



Bats for US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan for peace
Wants to follow Chinese model to lift poverty

financed billions of dollars of infrastructure projects.
"What Pakistan has to do is follow China's example where they lift people out of poverty," Khan said in the interview in a private jet after a long night of campaigning in Punjab province.
Whoever wins the election will also have to navigate Pakistan's often-fraught relations with the United States over the US-backed government's war against Taliban militants in neighbouring Afghanistan.
"I think the longer the US troops stay there, the less the chance of there being a political settlement," Khan said. "I think the Afghans, you know, if the US, even gives a timetable of withdrawal, and then gets the Afghans on the table, and then with the neighbours also chipping in, I think that

is the best chance of peace."
A victory for Khan's opposition party would mark a new political direction for Pakistan, which has been dominated by two parties - Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party of assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto - when the military has not been in power.
More than 20 years after Khan founded his political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice), the man still revered by many as captain of Pakistan's 1992 World Cup-winning cricket team, feels the stars have finally aligned for him.
In recent years, he has mostly shed the playboy image of his younger days, marrying his spiritual adviser earlier this year and making public shows of devotion to Islam.
His speeches are still peppered with cricket references but also have appeals to religious conservatives in the country of 208 million. And he has courted traditional power brokers with large followings in Punjab, the country's largest province that is key to any general election victory.
Khan's political fortunes were transformed last July when the Supreme Court disqualified three-time premier Sharif in a case that judges only took up when Khan threatened to paralyse the capital Islamabad with his supporters.

TALC CANCER CASE

J&J ordered to pay \$4.69b

AFP, Washington
US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson was Thursday ordered to pay out \$4.69 billion in damages in a lawsuit representing 22 women and their families who alleged a talc sold by the company contained asbestos and caused them to suffer cancer.
It is the latest twist in a matter that has seen several thousand lawsuits filed against J&J.
According to the victims' lawyer, Mark Lanier, a jury composed of six men and six women in St Louis, Missouri, ruled in favor of the women after a six-week trial and eight hours of deliberation. The damages include \$550 million in compensation and over \$4.1 billion in punitive damages.
The plaintiffs said using the talc

for personal hygiene had caused ovarian cancer.
"For over 40 years, Johnson & Johnson has covered up the evidence of asbestos in their products," Lanier said in a statement.



"We hope this verdict will get the attention of the J&J board and that it will lead them to better inform the medical community and the public about the connection between asbestos, talc, and ovarian cancer," he said, calling

for talc to be pulled from the market.
J&J said it was "deeply disappointed in the verdict."
In a statement, it described the trial as "a fundamentally unfair process that allowed plaintiffs to present a group of 22 women, most of whom had no connection to Missouri, in a single case all alleging that they developed ovarian cancer."
The company said its talc does not contain asbestos or cause ovarian cancer, and vowed it would "pursue all available appellate remedies."
Several similar trials have already taken place, with a Los Angeles appeals court last October dismissing a \$417 million verdict against J&J, saying the complainant's arguments were insufficient and vague.

'HINDU PAKISTAN' REMARK

Tharoor defiant amid criticism

Says RSS's vision for India 'mirror image' of Pakistan

AGENCIES
Congress leader Shashi Tharoor sparked off a controversy with his statement that if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is voted to power again, it will rewrite the Constitution that will eventually create a "Hindu Pakistan."
The BJP demanded an apology from Tharoor and called his statement "an attack on Indian democracy and Hindus", while the Congress distanced itself and advised its leaders on "responsible phraseology."
At an event in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday, Tharoor is reported to have said, "If they are able to win a repeat of their current strength in the Lok Sabha then, frankly, our own democratic Constitution, as we understand [it], will not survive... because then they will have all the three elements they need to tear up the Constitution of India and write a new one."
"And that will enshrine the principle of Hindu Rashtra, that will remove equality for the minorities, and that will create a Hindu Pakistan...and that is not what Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and great heroes of freedom struggle fought for," he added.
The BJP used strong language to hit back at him.
"Shashi Tharoor is the same person who called Indians 'cattle-class'. He is 'cattle-class-ing' the Indian democracy. You call yourself an educated and erudite spokesperson of the Congress. If you want to love Pakistan, do so, but do not display such hatred towards Indians," BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra told reporters at a briefing.
Patra said it was an insult to compare India's democracy to that of Pakistan, which he called "terroristan", and demanded that the Congress stop "fear-mongering."
Tharoor defended himself in a Facebook post to argue that the BJP and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) idea of a "Hindu Rashtra" was the "mirror image" of Pakistan.
"I have said this before and I will say it again. Pakistan was created as a state with a dominant religion, that discriminates against its minorities and denies them equal rights. India never accepted the logic that had partitioned the country. But the BJP/RSS idea of a 'Hindu Rashtra' is the mirror image of Pakistan a state with a dominant majority religion that seeks to put its minorities in a subordinate place."
Congress communication chief Randeep Surjewala, however, articulated the party's position in a series of tweets. "India's values & fundamentals are an unequivocal guarantee of our civilisational role & set us apart from the divisive idea of Pakistan. All Congress leaders must realise this historic responsibility bestowed upon us while choosing words & phraseology to reject BJP's hatred," he said.

India SC slams govt's plan to monitor data

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
India's Supreme Court yesterday said the decision by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to set up a social media hub to monitor online data will be "like creating a surveillance state."
A bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud asked the Indian government to respond within two weeks to a plea by Trinamool Congress (TMC) legislator Mahua Moitra and sought Attorney General K K Venugopal's assistance in the matter.
"The government wants to tap citizens' WhatsApp messages. It will be like creating a surveillance state," the bench observed.
Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Moitra, said the government has issued a request for proposal and the tender will be opened on August 20.
"They want to monitor social media content with the help of this social media hub," Singhvi said.
The bench then said it is listing the matter on August 3, before the opening of tender on August 20 and the Attorney General or any law officer for the government will assist the court in the matter.
Earlier, on June 18, the apex court had refused to accord urgent hearing on the plea seeking to stay a Indian government move to set up a 'Social Media Communication Hub' that would collect and analyse digital and social media content.
The counsel for Moitra had said that the government is trying to monitor social media content of individuals by tracking their social media accounts such as those on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and their e-mails.



Mukesh Ambani topples Jack Ma as Asia's richest person
BLOOMBERG ONLINE
Mukesh Ambani overtook Alibaba Group founder Jack Ma to become Asia's richest person as he positions Reliance Industries Ltd. to disrupt the e-commerce space in India.
The chairman of India's refining-to-telecoms conglomerate, Ambani was estimated to be worth \$44.3 billion yesterday with Reliance Industries Ltd. rising 1.6 percent to a record 1,099.8 rupees, according to Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Ma's wealth stood at \$44 billion at close of trade on Thursday in the US, where the company is listed.
Ambani has added \$4 billion to his fortune this year as Reliance doubled its petrochemicals capacity and investors cheered the success of his disruptive telecom upstart Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd. Then earlier this month, the tycoon unveiled plans to leverage his 215 million telecom subscribers to expand his e-commerce offerings.
Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.'s Ma has lost \$1.4 billion in 2018.
Ambani, best known for executing large-scale projects, spearheaded construction of the world's largest refining complex in Jamnagar, owns the most-widespread mobile data network globally and claims to have India's biggest as well as most-profitable retail firm.

Netflix taken to court in India over portrayal of former PM

REUTERS, Mumbai
An Indian politician has taken streaming giant Netflix to court, asking that it delete "offensive scenes" and derogatory remarks about former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in its first Indian original series.
The Delhi High Court adjourned the case on Thursday to give judges and respondents time to study the petition filed by Nikhil Bhalla, a lawyer and a member of the opposition Congress party, which Gandhi led for seven years until his assassination in 1991.
The series, Sacred Games, is a thriller set in Mumbai with a cast of police officers, spies and politicians. It debuted this month in the first of a series of new shows aimed at the Indian market.
In one scene, Gandhi is referred to as a "fattu", a Hindi slang word for a coward.
Grainy news footage shows him shaking hands with world leaders, while a voice-over

accuses him of appeasing Muslim groups in a case involving divorce rights for Muslim women.
"The show 'Sacred Games' has inappropriate dialogues, political attacks and even speeches, which are derogatory in nature and harms the reputation of the former Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi," the petition said.
A Netflix spokesman in India did not reply to phone calls and text messages seeking comment.
Gandhi became prime minister after his mother Indira was assassinated in 1984. He lost power five years later and in 1991, still holding the post of Congress party president, was killed by an ethnic Tamil suicide bomber.
His son, Rahul Gandhi, is the current party president.
The petition asks the court to order Netflix to delete derogatory remarks made directly or indirectly against Rajiv Gandhi or his family.



Lanka seeks hangman

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka is looking for an executioner to fill the vacant position of state hangman, prison officials said yesterday, after President Maithripala Sirisena ended the island's moratorium on capital punishment.
Prisons spokesman Thushara Upuldeniya said a job advertisement would be placed next week for the post of hangman after Sirisena announced drug traffickers would be put to death instead of left in jail for life.
Sri Lanka has not executed a prisoner since 1976. Criminals are regularly given death sentences for various crimes but their punishments have been commuted to life.
The island still officially employs a state executioner, but since 2014 all three hangmen who have filled the post have quit after short stints at the vacant gallows.

