

NEWSIN brief

8 Malaysian ex-spies under probe for graft

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

A group of former agents from Malaysia's foreign intelligence agency, including its chief, are being investigated for alleged misappropriation of government funds, a senior Malaysian anti-graft official said yesterday. The probe by the MACC is the latest in a widening crackdown on corruption allegedly linked to ex-PM Najib Razak.

ISS reports 'leak', crew not in danger

AFP, Moscow

The International Space Station crew was yesterday repairing a small "leak" most likely caused by a collision with a small meteorite, the head of the Russian space agency said, adding the incident presented no danger. Nasa confirmed the problem, saying it consisted of a "minute pressure leak" and that the crew was repairing it.

Television reporter killed in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

A Mexican television reporter was shot dead Wednesday in the resort city of Cancun, becoming the eighth journalist to be killed this year in a country notoriously dangerous for the media. Javier Enrique Rodriguez Valladares worked as a cameraman and reporter for Canal 10.

Thai Queen Mother leaves hospital

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's 86-year-old Queen Mother Sirikit was discharged from a Bangkok hospital yesterday, the Royal Household Bureau said in a statement, after being hospitalized for influenza. The Queen Mother, the widow of King Bhumibol Adulyadej who died in 2016 after seven decades on the throne, was admitted to hospital on August 19.



Myanmar soldiers use a boat to help residents cross a flooded area in Swar town of Bago region yesterday. *Inset*, rescuers carry an elderly flood victim to safety in the town. A large-scale rescue effort marches on into a second day to reach thousands of people stranded in their homes in Central Myanmar after a dam swollen by monsoon rain left the region inundated.

PHOTO: AFP



Trump hails N Korea's Kim

Sees no need to resume US-South Korea war games, accuses China of stalling progress in nuke talks with Pyongyang

REUTERS, Washington

Days after cancelling a planned visit to North Korea by his top diplomat citing insufficient progress in denuclearisation talks, US President Donald Trump hailed his personal relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Wednesday and said there was no reason to resume war games with South Korea.

Trump's statement came a day after his defense secretary hinted that the drills, which North Korea denounces as rehearsals for invasion, could resume.

Trump tweeted a White House statement in which he once again questioned China's role in helping to resolve the crisis over North Korea's development of nuclear weapons that threaten the United States.

The statement said Trump believed North Korea was under "tremendous pressure" from China, but Beijing was also supplying Pyongyang with "considerable aid," including fuel, fertiliser and commodities.

"This is not helpful," the statement said.

"Nonetheless, the President believes that his relationship with Kim Jong Un is a very good and warm

one, and there is no reason at this time to be spending large amounts of money on joint US-South Korea war games," it added.

"Besides, the President can instantly start the joint exercises again with South Korea, and Japan, if he so chooses. If he does, they will be far bigger than ever before."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said the remarks regarding China's role on the North Korea issue were "irresponsible".

"The US side's irresponsible distortion of facts and logic is world-leading and really not something the ordinary person can understand," Hua told a regular news briefing yesterday in Beijing when asked about Trump's tweet.

The United States and South Korea have internally

agreed to carry out the joint military air drill "Vigilant Ace" in December and are discussing the size of the drill and the extent of the participation, South Korean newspaper JoongAng Ilbo reported yesterday, citing multiple unnamed government sources.

South Korea's defense ministry said that nothing has been decided about whether to hold "Vigilant Ace" this year.



S Korea says nothing has been decided about whether to hold drills

China slams Trump's logic on North Korea



Have faith in law

Says one of the five Indian rights activists who were arrested over alleged Maoist links

NDTV ONLINE

Varavara Rao, one of the five activists who were arrested, has been brought home in Hyderabad yesterday.

The Supreme Court had granted them reprieve on Wednesday, after hearing a petition challenging the arrests. The court said poet and Maoist ideologue Varavara Rao and activists Sudha Bharadwaj, Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha and Vernon Gonsalves, will be under house arrest till the next hearing on September 6. The top court has asked the Maharashtra government to file a response to the petition challenging the arrests.

"I am saying it from the beginning, that on basis of false statements, a case was filed against me. I have faith in the law," said Rao after reaching home. Earlier at the airport Rao told reporters, "If the fight against fascist policies is called a conspiracy, then there cannot be a bigger conspiracy than this (calling the fight a conspiracy)."

He added: "The Supreme Court has ordered house arrest. As we have been saying, this is a false case against us. Bhima-

Koregaon case should have been filed against the state and central governments."

"The Pune police brought him home at 7 in the morning. He was brought to the city by flight," Rao's wife Hemalatha told news agency PTI, adding that the police is "not allowing anyone except his daughters and sons-in-law" into the house. When the news agency tried to talk to Rao, his wife said the police have ordered him not to talk to the media.

"They came at 6:00 am on Tuesday. They searched the entire house and seized the mobile phones. They took the papers and hard disks," Udaya told news agency ANI.

The Pune police had arrested the five activists in connection with a case lodged after the Elgar Parishad conclave held in Pune on December 31 last year, that had allegedly triggered violence at Bhima-Koregaon village.

During the arguments in the court, the public prosecutor claimed that the accused were planning to "wage a war" against the country and were involved in procuring arms and funding Maoist activities. The prosecutor said Rao, Gonsalves and Ferreira were active members of the banned CPI (Maoists).



Varavara Rao

Demonetisation was 'assault on the people'

Rahul Gandhi takes on Modi over note ban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's top opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday launched a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of demonetisation, saying he owed the people an answer on why he "inflicted such a deep wound" when pressing problems like unemployment remained.

Addressing a press conference, Rahul termed demonetisation the country's "biggest scam" and alleged that money was taken from common people and given to "crony capitalists".

On November 8, 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the scrapping of high-value currency notes of Rs 1,000 and Rs 500.



"Prime Minister Modi should answer why he inflicted a deep wound like demonetisation when issues like unemployment and low GDP rate remained," Rahul said while referring to the Reserve Bank of India's report on the outcome of the demonetisation exercise.

According to the report, over 99 percent of the banned currency is back in banking system.

The Congress party president also alleged that demonetisation was not a mistake and was done deliberately to attack the people.

"Demonetisation was not a mistake but assault on you (the people of India). The intention was to help his 15-20 crony capitalist friends by taking money from the common man and filling their pockets," Gandhi said.



Firefighters prepare to work on a giant factory fire in the inner Melbourne suburb of West Footscray yesterday. More than 120 firefighters are fighting the fire, with 30 trucks and cherry picker aerial appliances on the scene which is sending large plumes of smoke across the city.

PHOTO: AFP

REGION'S AUTONOMY

Kashmir shuts down ahead of SC hearing

AFP, Srinagar

A general strike and curfew brought Indian-administered Kashmir to a standstill yesterday ahead of a landmark Supreme Court hearing centred on the region's autonomy.

Separatist leaders have threatened major protests if the Supreme Court annuls a constitutional provision that bars Indians from outside Kashmir from buying land or seeking government jobs in the territory.

Businesses, schools and public transport across Kashmir followed separatist demands to stay closed while government forces rolled out razor wire and spiked steel barriers across deserted roads in the main city Srinagar to block demonstrations.

Srinagar residents said they were prevented from going out on the streets by major deployments of police and paramilitary troops.

"It is a curfew. No-one can go out," one school teacher in the city told AFP.

Today's hearing in New Delhi has caused a major spike in tensions, adding to the near daily deaths in battles between government troops and rebels.

Government forces killed two suspected rebels in a gun battle in the northern district of Hajin during search operations yesterday. On Wednesday, rebels killed four police officers while Indian troops killed two militants.

'Thousands' of migrants want to come home

Says recession-hit Venezuela as Brazil sends troops to border

AFP, Caracas

Thousands of Venezuelans are clamoring to return home to recession, hyperinflation and a collapsing economy, President Nicolas Maduro's government claimed on Wednesday as Brazil sends troops to the border with its crisis-ridden neighbor.

A day after Maduro told the hundreds of thousands of his compatriots who have already fled the region's worst economic crisis in recent memory "to return from economic slavery: stop cleaning toilets abroad and come back to live in your homeland," Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez claimed many are trying to do exactly that.

Rodriguez said Venezuelan embassies around the world are inundated with requests from citizens to return home, but that the gov-

ernment "cannot publicize it until it's happening in real time" for fear of "retaliation against those Venezuelans seeking repatriation."

According to the United Nations, some 1.6 million Venezuelans have fled the country since 2015, with the numbers accelerating all the time.

On Monday, Venezuela chartered an airplane to bring 89 citizens back home from Peru, where Maduro said they had suffered "racism, contempt, economic persecution and slavery."

Peru recently tightened its border controls, requiring Venezuelans fleeing poverty and an economic meltdown to show a passport to enter after saying that more than 400,000 were already living in the country.

Rodriguez singled out Peru, Ecuador and Colombia for special criticism as countries where Venezuelans have been the victims of "xenophobia and hate crimes."



XINJIANG SANCTIONS CALL

China rebukes US lawmakers

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday sharply rebuked US lawmakers who called on President Donald Trump's administration to slap sanctions on Chinese officials involved in the internment of a Muslim minority in the country's far-west Xinjiang region.

"The US has no right to criticise China on this issue, to be a judge in this regard," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, pointing to America's own issues with racial discrimination.

"These lawmakers are receiving money from the American taxpayer, they should focus on their job... instead of trying to poke their nose in the business of other countries, trying to be the judge of human rights and even threatening to impose unreasonable sanctions on other countries," Hua added.

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin on Wednesday, members of Congress from both parties called for sanctions against seven officials and two surveillance equipment manufacturers.

"Today I and a bipartisan group of 16 members of Congress asked @POTUS to use the Global Magnitsky Act to freeze the assets & ban the entry of Chinese officials responsible for the mass roundup of Muslims in internment camps in the #Xinjiang region," Marco Rubio said on Twitter.

China has denied allegations that one million of its mostly Muslim Uighur minority are being held in such camps.



ROHINGYA CRACKDOWN

UK diplomat to visit Myanmar to seek answers

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

UK Foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt will visit Myanmar "to seek answers" after a damning United Nations (UN) report on the army's violent crackdown on the country's Rohingya Muslims.

Investigators have declared the systematic targeting of the Rohingya to be a campaign of genocide, involving crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The human-rights observers said Myanmar's commander-in-chief and five other named generals should face prosecution for acting with "genocidal intent".

Hunt said the report was "deeply disturbing", adding there should "never be a hiding place for those who commit these kind of atrocities".