

NEWSIN brief

Amsterdam stabbing hurts 2; attacker held

AFP, The Hague

A knife attacker yesterday stabbed two people at Amsterdam's Central Station before being shot by police, Dutch police said. Witnesses described scenes of panic as gunshots rang out and thousands of commuters and tourists were evacuated from the rail terminus shortly after midday. It is not known at this stage whether the incident is terror related. Amsterdam police spokesman Rob van der Veen said two people were badly injured and taking treatment in hospital. terrorism was not being ruled out by investigators, he added.

Japan eyes record defence budget

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's defence ministry yesterday made its biggest-ever budget request, seeking better missile defence and bolstered air power amid ongoing threats from North Korea and China. The ministry wants 5.298 trillion yen (\$47 billion) for the next fiscal year from April, the seventh straight annual increase and 2.1 percent more than last year.



Moon to send special envoy to N Korea

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Moon Jae-in will send a special envoy to Pyongyang next Wednesday to discuss plans to hold a summit with the North's Kim Jong Un and nuclear disarmament, Moon's office said yesterday. The unnamed envoy will visit the North's capital on September 5.



'Shape up or We will quit'

Trump tells WTO
AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump has threatened to pull the United States out of the World Trade Organization if it does not "shape up." His remarks, made in an interview with Bloomberg News on Thursday, were the latest in a series of attacks on institutions of the global order that the US helped to build after World War II. "If they don't shape up, I would withdraw from the WTO," Trump told the news agency, describing the agreement to set the organization up as "the single worst trade deal ever made".

Trump, who has previously criticized the WTO's dispute settlement system as being unfavorable to the US, said Washington had "rarely won a lawsuit" there although things began changing last year. "In the last year, we're starting to win a lot," he said. "You know why? Because they know if we don't, I'm out of there." China, which is currently embroiled in a trade war with the US, joined the WTO in 2001 -- a move which US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has described as a mistake.

Trump made the threat as Washington presses challenges at the WTO against trading partners that have fought back against tariffs on imports that were imposed by the Trump administration.



Protesters shout slogans during a second day of a strike called by Kashmiri separatists against attempts to revoke state constitution articles 35A and 370 in Srinagar, yesterday. Kashmir rebels abducted 11 relatives of police in the troubled region as mounting tensions forced India's Supreme Court yesterday to put back a landmark hearing on the state's autonomous rights. Article 35A bars Indians from outside Kashmir from buying land or seeking government jobs in the territory.

PHOTO: AFP

Free 1 million Uighurs

UN calls on China to release the minority from 're-education' camps

REUTERS, Geneva

United Nations' human rights experts voiced alarm on Thursday over alleged Chinese political re-education camps for Muslim Uighurs and they called for the immediate release of those detained on the "pretext of countering terrorism".

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination cited estimates that up to one million Uighurs may be held involuntarily in extra-legal detention in China's far western Xinjiang province.

Its findings were issued after a two-day review this month of China's record, the first since 2009.

China's foreign ministry rejected the allegations at the time, and said anti-China forces were behind the criticism of Beijing's policies in Xinjiang.

It has never officially confirmed the existence of detention centres there.

China has said Xinjiang faces a serious threat from Islamist militants and separatists who plot attacks and stir up tension between the mostly Muslim Uighur minority and the

ethnic Han Chinese majority.

But the panel decried China's "broad definition of terrorism and vague references to extremism and unclear definition of separatism in Chinese legislation".

This could be used against those

UN panel accuses China of using
counter-terrorism 'pretext'

Findings issued after review of
Chinese record on minorities

Chinese foreign ministry says
anti-China forces behind criticism

peacefully exercising their rights and facilitate "criminal profiling" of ethnic and religious minorities, including Uighurs, Buddhist Tibetans and Mongolians, it said.

In its conclusions, the panel said it was alarmed by "Numerous reports of detention of large numbers of ethnic

Uighurs and other Muslim minorities held incommunicado and often for long periods, without being charged or tried, under the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism."

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying yesterday said the UN experts' comments had "no factual basis", adding that people's satisfaction with Xinjiang's security and stability had risen dramatically.

During the review the experts said they had received many credible reports that around a million Uighurs are held in what resembles a "massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy". Panel member Gay McDougall described it as a "no-rights zone".

The panel expressed concern over reports of "mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uighurs", such as frequent police checks and scanning of mobile phones at checkpoints.

It also cited reports that many Uighurs who had left China had been forced to return to the country, and called on Beijing to disclose their whereabouts and status.

Trump insists White House a 'smooth-running machine'

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump insisted Thursday that his daughter played no role in the abrupt departure of his top lawyer and pushed back at the notion of a White House in chaos, calling it "a smooth-running machine with changing parts."

The announced departure of White House counsel Don McGahn, who has emerged as a key witness in the Russia probe shadowing his presidency, was the latest in a long string of firings and resignations to buffet Trump's administration.

The New York Times reported that McGahn was not forewarned before Trump announced Wednesday on Twitter he would be leaving his post this fall.

The Times said Ivanka Trump had complained bitterly to her father after a report by the newspaper that claimed McGahn's testimony to Special Counsel Robert Mueller had been far more extensive than the president or his lawyers knew.

In a series of tweets on Thursday, Trump

said Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, "had NOTHING to do with the so called 'pushing out' of Don McGahn."

"The Fake News Media has it, purposely, so wrong!" Trump tweeted.

"They love to portray chaos in the White House when they know that chaos doesn't exist-just a 'smooth running machine' with changing parts!"

McGahn was a witness to several key episodes under scrutiny by Mueller, including Trump's firing of FBI director James Comey and his tensions with Attorney General Jeff Sessions over his recusal from oversight of the probe.

Later on Thursday, Trump branded the investigation "illegal" -- despite the fact his own Justice Department says the opposite.

"I view it as an illegal investigation," he told Bloomberg News.

He cited unnamed "great scholars" who say that "there never should have been a special counsel," according to the news agency.



EU backs ending daylight saving time

AFP, Geneva

The European Union yesterday said it will recommend member countries abolish the twice-yearly clock change following an unprecedented citizen appeal that drew immediate support from Germany, the bloc's biggest economy.

The European Commission, the executive of the 28-nation bloc, said most EU citizens answering an online survey complained that the time change was disruptive, caused sleep problems, harmed their health and increased road accidents.

"Millions of Europeans used our public consultation to make their voices heard," Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc said as the executive commission pledged to act on the findings.

"The message is very clear: 84 percent of them do not want the clocks to change anymore," Bulc said at the commission's annual retreat to a lake side hotel in Geneva, Belgium.

She told reporters the commission is now preparing a proposal to send to the European Parliament and the 28 member countries in the following weeks, one she said could be enacted by 2020 or 2021.

According to preliminary results, some 4.6 million European citizens responded to the online poll -- the biggest in EU history, Bulc said -- on whether they wanted the change.

Since 1996, all Europeans have been advancing their clock by one hour on the last Sunday of March and putting it back one hour on the last Sunday of October.



Palestinian demonstrators scuffle with Israeli troops during a protest against Israeli settlement construction, in the village of Ras Karkar, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

OUTRAGE OVER ARRESTS OF INDIAN ACTIVISTS

They were planning 'Rajiv Gandhi-like incident': cops

NDTV ONLINE

Facing criticism on the raids and arrests targeting rights activists, the Maharashtra police today claimed solid evidence including "thousands of documents and letters" that established the activists' links to Maoists and their role in facilitating weapons and funding.

"We have thousands of letters which show how these people were involved in the underground movement, how students from Jawaharlal Nehru University were being mobilised to overthrow the elected government. All these letters just make the Maoists links clearer," said Param Bir Singh, Additional Director General, Maharashtra Police, in a press conference this evening.

He read out a letter exchanged between an activist arrested not this week but earlier in June, which spoke of planning "another Rajiv Gandhi-like incident to end Modi-raj". Some of the letters, he said, spoke of planning "some big action" which would attract attention.

The senior police officer said they even found a rocket launcher pamphlet in one of the seized disks.

"A letter written from Delhi-based activist Rona Wilson to Maoist leader Prakash on July 30, 2017, spoke of requirement of Rs. 8 crore for grenade launchers with four lakh rounds", he said.

Rona Wilson was one of the five activists arrested in June in connection with violence between Dalits and upper caste Marathas at a mass event held on December 31-January 1 at Bhima Koregaon near Pune.

The activists who were arrested on Tuesday - Maoist ideologue Varavara Rao, lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, activists Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha and Vernon Gonsalves - are under house arrest on the Supreme Court's orders.

The Maharashtra police said there was enough evidence to prove that these activists were working to destabilise the government.

Police said the accused had been in touch with around 35 major universities and colleges "to recruit young students to take their movement ahead".

Syria assault may spark humanitarian calamity

AFP, Beirut

Its hospitals are battered, residents heavily dependent on aid and escape routes to neighbouring Turkey sealed. If attacked by government forces, Syria's rebel-held Idlib is poised for a humanitarian calamity.

The northwestern province, which lies along the border with Turkey, has been held since 2015 by the jihadist-led Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance and other rival rebels.

Idlib and slivers of adjacent provinces form the largest remaining block of rebel territory -- and the next expected target of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's troops and their Russian allies.

But a military assault could overwhelm already struggling health facilities, cut off food and medical supplies to desperate civilians, and prompt massive levels of displacement, the United Nations has warned.

Activists said violence could force as many as 800,000 people to flee in one of the Syrian war's largest displacements yet. The question, aid groups have warned, is where to.

Turkey already hosts more than three million Syrian refugees and since 2015 has kept its border sealed to any more.

Meanwhile, rebels from Idlib have blown up two key bridges in a bid to hamper an expected government assault.

In recent days, both the government and its ally Russia have stepped up their rhetoric against the rebel presence in Idlib, which is dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) jihadist alliance formed by al-Qaeda's former Syrian branch, Al-Nusra Front.

Conflicts 'killed 5m children in Africa'

AFP, Paris

Injury, disease, and hunger caused by armed conflict in Africa may have killed as many as five million children under five from 1995 to 2015, said a study yesterday.

Of these, about three million were infants aged 12 months or younger.

The research, published in The Lancet medical journal, did not rely on an actual headcount, but compared data on 15,441 conflicts in which nearly a million people died, with child birth and death registers, the research team said.

They used these data to calculate the risk of a child dying within 100 kilometres (62 miles) and eight years of an armed conflict, and then estimated the number of child deaths attributable to Africa's many wars.

The five million figure was much higher than previous estimates, the authors said.

"More frequent and more intense armed conflicts have taken place in Africa over the past 30 years than in any other continent," they wrote.

"This analysis shows that the effects of armed conflict extend beyond the deaths of combatants and physical devastation: armed conflict substantially increases the risk of death of young children, for a long period of time."

Apart from directly injuring some children, conflicts contribute to death and stunting "for many years, and over wide areas," the team said.

Deaths result from the interruption of interrupted medical care for pregnant women and newborns, disease spread as sanitary services and water networks crumble, a lack of medicines, and malnutrition as food runs out.

POLICE INACTION

Rape victim sets herself on fire in India

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian rape victim has died in hospital after setting herself on fire in protest at police failing to take action, an official said yesterday.

Police superintendent S. Channappa told AFP that there had been a "lapse" by police and that an investigation was underway to see if the woman's family had been pressured not to make a complaint.

The 28-year-old woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, died late Thursday in a hospital in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh state, 24 hours after suffering critical burn injuries when she set herself alight at her home.

"We have arrested the accused today and also suspended the concerned police officers until further orders," Channappa told AFP.

The woman and her husband went to police on August 23 to lodge a rape complaint. The husband has alleged that police refused to register a case and asked them to settle the matter with the accused who came from the same village.

"We have a letter signed by the victim and her family that they reached an understanding with the accused," Channappa said.

Authorities are now investigating if the victim was coerced by officials. "A complaint should have been registered immediately. That is a lapse on our part," Channappa said.

Sexual violence is rife in India, with nearly 40,000 rape cases reported in 2016. Activists say this is just the tip of the iceberg.

India has been the focus of international attention since the 2012 gang-rape and murder of a student on a Delhi bus sparked nationwide protests and highlighted its poor record on sexual violence.

Uttar Pradesh has been rocked by high profile rape cases in recent months, including one that allegedly involved