

Blasts at Syrian
airbase kill 2

AFP, Beirut

At least two pro-government forces were killed overnight in a string of explosions at the Mazzeh airbase near the Syrian capital, a monitoring group said yesterday. An electrical fault caused the blasts early yesterday, a Syrian military source cited by state media and an Iranian official said.

Chopper crash in
Afghanistan kills 3

AFP, Mazar-i-sharif

A helicopter crash in northern Afghanistan yesterday killed at least three people including a foreign pilot, Afghan officials said. The aircraft crashed due to "technical problems" shortly after taking off in Dehdadi district in Balkh province. Ten people were on board the helicopter at the time of the accident.

Japan braces for
'strong' typhoon

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday braced for a "very strong" typhoon, with authorities warning of high waves, floods and landslides, including in areas hit by deadly flooding earlier this year. Typhoon Jebi, packing winds of up to 252 kilometres an hour, is expected to make landfall on the country's main island tomorrow.

China detain 46 at
education protest

REUTERS, Beijing

Chinese police yesterday said it has detained 46 people in Leiying city after bottles, bricks and firecrackers were thrown at officers and government officials during a protest against problems in the education system. People angry about the difficulty of enrolling their children at public schools protested near six schools and a government building and blocked roads, police said.



A woman runs past the debris at the site of a blast in the district office of Hawlwadag in Mogadishu, Somalia, yesterday. At least six people were killed when a suicide car bomb struck a local government office in central Mogadish, destroying the building and a Quranic school opposite. Islamist militant group Al Shabaab claimed responsibility of the attack.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US acts like 'wild wolves' May rules out second
Says Turkey's Erdogan, vows to abandon dollar in trade
Brexit referendum

AFP, Bishkek

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed Ankara would pursue non-dollar transactions in trade with Russia and other countries, accusing the US of behaving like "wild wolves."

Both Turkey and Russia are reeling from punitive economic measures imposed by Washington. "America behaves like wild wolves. Don't believe them," Erdogan told a business forum during a visit to Kyrgyzstan, in comments translated into Kyrgyz.

He said his country was in negotiations with Russia over non-dollar trade. "Using the dollar only damages us. We will not give up. We will be victorious," Erdogan told the meeting, attended by Kyrgyz and Turkish businessmen as well as government officials.

Ties between Nato members Washington and Ankara hit a new low last month as US President Donald Trump announced steep new tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminium in response to the detention of an American pastor in Turkey.

The Turkish lira shed a quarter of its value last month as the trade war with the US ratcheted up.

Russia meanwhile saw its ruble tumble to two-year lows in August after the US announced fresh sanctions in connection with a nerve agent poisoning incident in the British city

of Salisbury.

Erdogan has also used the visit to ex-Soviet Kyrgyzstan to demand the Central Asian country of six million people relinquish all ties to Fethullah Gulen, a US-based cleric and educator Ankara accuses of fomenting a coup in 2016.

Speaking yesterday, Erdogan said Turkish businesses should invest in Kyrgyzstan but "may face barriers from FETO," the term Ankara uses to describe the network of people and institutions linked to Gulen.

The refusal of the United States to extradite 77-year-old Gulen to face trial in Turkey is one of several sore points that have plagued a once-strong bilateral relationship.

Gulen, whose Hizmet movement has led to the creation of schools in dozens of countries including Kyrgyzstan has always denied any links to the 2016 coup attempt.

Since July 2016, over 55,000 people have been arrested over coup links in Turkey, while more than 140,000 public sector employees have been sacked or suspended.

The government has led in parallel a diplomatic offensive to shut down educational institutions affiliated to Gulen in countries around the world.

Erdogan on Friday said Turkey will buy some of Russia's highly-sophisticated air defence systems "in the shortest time" -- a purchase that has alarmed Ankara's Nato partners.



Turkey was in talks with Russia over non-dollar trade: Erdogan

US-Turkey ties hit a new low as President Trump announced new tariffs

CNN ONLINE

British Prime Minister Theresa May has ruled out a second referendum on Britain's exit from the European Union, saying it would be a "gross betrayal" of democracy.

Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, May said she would not "give in to those who want to re-open the whole question with a second referendum," adding that "to ask the question all over again would be a gross betrayal of our democracy -- and a betrayal of that trust."

Her comments came after "the People's Vote" campaign group, which is calling for a second Brexit referendum, recently secured a \$1.3 million (£1 million) donation from British fashion mogul Julian Dunkerton.

Other high-profile backers of another referendum include former PM Tony Blair, former Rolls-Royce chairman Simon Robertson, actor Patrick Stewart and BBC football host Gary Lineker.

UK voters in June 2016 voted yes in a referendum to leave the EU, more than four

KATHMANDU AIRPORT SCARE

Domestic plane
skids off runway

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's only international airport had to be closed for some 11 hours after a domestic aircraft skidded off the recently repaired runway, officials said yesterday.

The Jetstream 41 was flying in to Kathmandu from Nepalgunj in southern Nepal late Saturday with 21 passengers onboard when it suffered a runway excursion before coming to a halt onto the adjoining grassland.

Nobody was hurt in the incident but incoming and outgoing flights to Nepal's sole international air gateway were diverted while authorities tried to remove the aircraft, which had become stuck in mud.

The airport reopened at 8 am Sunday after the aircraft was moved.

The incident comes amid mounting safety concerns over cracks on the runway's surface, which was repaired only recently.

Nepal has a poor air safety record and Nepal-based airlines are banned from flying in European Union airspace.

In April a Malaysian jet with 139 people on board aborted its takeoff and skidded off the runway. In March, a US-Bangla Airways plane crashed near the airport, killing 51 people.

The Himalayan nation has some of the world's most remote and tricky runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks with approaches that pose a challenge for even accomplished pilots.



decades after joining. Brexit is due to take place on March 29, 2019, followed by a 21-month transition period when the divorce comes into effect.

UK lawmakers are expected to vote on a final Brexit deal as early as next month. But with the UK and EU still at loggerheads over May's Brexit plan, announced in July, this deadline appears unlikely to be met.

May said that she was confident a "good deal" would be reached, but admitted there was "still a lot more negotiating to be done."

"It is only responsible that we have also spent time this summer preparing for a 'no deal' scenario, just as the EU have done too," she wrote in the Sunday Telegraph. "As

the head of the [World Trade Organization] has said, no deal would not be the end of the world, but it wouldn't be a walk in the park either."

Among the biggest sticking points in the deal have been the Northern Ireland border, and the rights of EU citizens living in the UK.

ASSAM CITIZENSHIP LIST

Life upended for
those left out

AFP, Guwahati

Nimai Hajong remembers almost nothing of the hills of eastern Bangladesh where he was born more than half a century ago, having fled as a small child to India where he has lived as a refugee ever since.

The 58-year-old has been declared a foreigner -- one of four million people effectively stripped of citizenship by the government of the northeastern state of Assam.

Their names have been left off a draft list of citizens published late July.

The controversial registry includes only those able to show they were in Assam before 1971, when millions fled to the state to escape Bangladesh's war of independence, and their descendants.

However, many whose families arrived before 1971 say authorities have rejected their papers and left them off the list.

Critics say it is the latest move by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bolster India's Hindu majority at the expense of minorities. India will hold a national election next year.

Many of those left off the list are Muslims, but those of other minorities and faiths -- including Hindus -- have also missed out.

State officials say no "genuine" Indians need to worry



about being left off the list, and there are avenues for appeal.

"WHERE DO WE GO NOW?"

Nimai's family are Hajong, a Hindu indigenous people from the Chittagong Hill Tracts bordering India and Myanmar, a region wracked by decades of ethnic conflict.

They were shocked to discover their names left off after submitting the same paperwork to authorities that had allowed them to remain in India for more than 50 years.

"What do we do now? We have accepted this land as our home since 1964, and we have nowhere to go," Hajong told AFP in the small settlement of Bamunigaon, roughly 30 kilometres from Assam's capital Guwahati.

LOCAL TENSIONS

Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party won control of Assam in 2016 after promising to expel illegal immigrants and protect the rights of indigenous groups.

Millions fled Bangladesh during its 1971 war, but waves of refugees including the Hajong and the Buddhist Chakma had also escaped persecution to come to India before that. Migrants have since been accused of illegally entering the state and taking land and jobs, causing tensions with locals.

YEMEN CONFLICT

Saudi coalition
regrets errors
in bus attack

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi-led coalition fighting rebels in Yemen admitted Saturday that "mistakes" had been made in an August air strike that killed 40 children.

The bombing on a crowded market in part of northern Yemen held by Huthi rebels killed a total of 51 people, according to the Red Cross.

Fifty-six children were also among the 79 people wounded in the August 9 strike on Saada province, a stronghold of the Iran-backed Huthis bordering Saudi Arabia.

The incident sparked a wave of international anger and calls by the United Nations Security Council for a "credible and transparent" investigation.

Coalition spokesman Mansour al-Mansour said a coalition probe had found that errors were made prior to the strike, and called for those responsible to be "punished".

He told a press conference in Riyadh that "an order had been given not to target the bus, which was among civilians, but the order arrived late".

Another error was that "the target did not pose an immediate threat and that targeting the bus in a residential area was unjustified at that time," he said.

The coalition had claimed to have targeted a bus carrying rebels.

Mansour repeated Saturday that the bus had been "transporting Huthi leaders" according to information from intelligence services.

But he admitted the strike had "caused collateral damage".

The coalition has been accused of committing numerous blunders in Yemen.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Participants of the demonstration of Germany's anti-immigration party Alternative for Germany (AfD) attack police in Chemnitz, Germany. Eighteen people were injured as the anti-migrant far-right and counter-protesters held opposing rallies in the German city of Chemnitz, which was hit by xenophobic demonstrations last week.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RISING SEA LEVEL

Bangkok struggles to stay afloat

AFP, Bangkok

As Bangkok prepares to host climate-change talks, the sprawling city of more than 10 million is itself under siege from the environment, with dire forecasts warning it could be partially submerged in just over a decade.

A preparatory meeting begins Tuesday in Thailand's capital for the next UN climate conference, a crunch summit in Poland at the end of 2018 to set rules on reducing greenhouse emissions and providing aid to vulnerable countries.

As temperatures rise, abnormal weather patterns -- like more powerful cyclones, erratic rainfall, and intense droughts and floods -- are predicted to worsen over time, adding pressure on governments tasked with bringing the 2015 Paris climate treaty to life.

Bangkok, built on once-marshy

land about 1.5 metres (five feet) above sea level, is projected to be one of the world's hardest hit urban areas, alongside fellow Southeast Asian behemoths Jakarta and Manila.

"Nearly 40 percent" of Bangkok will be inundated by as early as 2030 due to extreme rainfall and changes in weather patterns, according to a World Bank report.

Currently, the capital "is sinking one to two centimetres a year and there is a risk of massive flooding in the near future," said Tara Buakamsri of Greenpeace.

Seas in the nearby Gulf of Thailand are rising by four millimetres a year, above the global average.

The city "is already largely under sea level", said Buakamsri.

In 2011, when the monsoon season brought the worst floods in decades, a fifth of the city was under water.

Experts say unchecked urbanisation

and eroding shorelines will leave Bangkok and its residents in a critical situation.

With the weight of skyscrapers contributing to the city's gradual descent into water, Bangkok has become a victim of its own frenetic development.

Making things worse, the canals which used to traverse the city have now been replaced by intricate road networks, said Suppakorn Chinvanho, a climate expert at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.

Shrimp farms and other aquacultural development -- sometimes replacing mangrove forests that protected against storm surges -- have also caused significant erosion to the coastline nearest the capital.

This means that Bangkok could be penned in by flooding from the sea in the south and monsoon floods from the north, said Chinvanho.

War unlikely

Says Khamenei amid
row with US

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday said war was unlikely but called on Iran's armed forces to boost their defence capacities, according to his official website, as the country faces increased tension with the United States.

On Saturday, Iran announced plans to boost its ballistic and cruise missile capacity and acquire modern fighter planes and submarines to boost its defences following the U.S. pullout from Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers.

"Ayatollah Khamenei emphasised that based on political calculations there is no likelihood of a military war but added that the armed forces must be vigilant ... and raise their personnel and equipment capacities," the website quoted Khamenei as telling commanders of Iran's air defence forces.



"The Supreme Leader said ... the air defence units were a very sensitive part of the armed forces and on the front line of confronting the enemy, and emphasized the need to increase their readiness and capabilities," the website said in its report on the gathering, which was held to mark Iran's Air Defence Day.

Saturday's news of the military development plans came a day after Iran dismissed a French call for negotiations on Tehran's future nuclear plans, its ballistic missile arsenal and its role in wars in Syria and Yemen.