

NEWS IN
briefPeru annuls Fujimori's
pardon, orders arrest

AFP, Lima

A Peruvian court on Wednesday annulled ex-president Alberto Fujimori's pardon for crimes against humanity and ordered the 80-year-old's immediate arrest. Justice department said that top court "issued the arrest and detention orders against Fujimori so that he may be re-integrated into the prison establishment."

Nepal orders crackdown
on porn websites

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal said yesterday it had ordered more than 24,000 pornography websites to be blocked under a crackdown that activists have criticised as "ridiculous" and ineffective. The move follows a national outpouring of anger this summer in response to the brutal rape and murder of a 13-year-old schoolgirl in July.

Indian elephant hunt
for tigress kills woman

AFP, Mumbai

An elephant that was part of a group hunting a man-eating tigress in western India ran astray overnight and trampled a woman to death, an official said yesterday. The pachyderm was one of five elephants engaged in a search operation for a tigress that is suspected to have killed up to 13 people in Maharashtra state.

Myanmar torches \$1.3m
of illegal wildlife parts

AFP, Naypyidaw

Elephant skins, clouded leopard remains and tiger bones were among a \$1.3 million haul of illegal wildlife incinerated yesterday in Myanmar's first ever public event of its kind against the illicit trade. Trafficking and selling endangered animals is rampant across Myanmar, especially in border areas which serve as a key hub in the \$20 billion a year global wildlife trade.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attend a meeting in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RUSSIA'S \$5B ARMS DEAL WITH INDIA

US, Chinese unease

Putin, Modi also set to discuss second Russian-built nuke power plant during two-day talks in New Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in India yesterday looking to tie up billions of dollars in arms deals with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, likely irking the US, China and Pakistan in one fell swoop.

The Kremlin said before the two-day visit by Putin and top ministers that the "key feature" would be the signing of a \$5-billion deal for the S-400 air defence system, despite the risk of US sanctions against countries buying Russian defence kit.

Putin arrived in Delhi yesterday evening and he and Modi were due to have dinner before the main talks today. The route of Putin's convoy was lined with placards welcoming him in Russian and Hindi.

On Wednesday, the United States poured cold water on India's efforts to obtain a waiver to avoid sanctions under legislation called Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

Upgrades in arms systems "including the S-400 air and missile defense system" would be a particular focus for CAATSA, a US State Department spokesperson was quoted as saying by India's PTI news agency.

Last month Washington slapped financial sanctions on the Chinese

military drills in 2019, and agreed on the exchange of sensitive military information. The US is now India's second biggest arms supplier.

But Russia remains number one, and a string of new deals with the Asian giant would be a major win for Moscow -- and a big snub to the US.

Putin and Modi, who appear to enjoy a personal rapport, are also likely to discuss a deal for four Krievak-class frigates worth \$2 billion and 200 light utility Ka-226 helicopters pegged at \$1 billion.

"It's about time we showed that we are not going to be pushed around by Washington," R.R. Subramanian, a Delhi-based strategic affairs analyst, told AFP.

Experts say India needs the sophisticated S-400 to fill critical gaps in its defence capabilities, in view of China's rise and perceived threats from Pakistan, against whom India has fought three wars.

Putin, 65, and Modi, 68, are also set to discuss a possible second Russian-built nuclear power plant. Moscow is currently expanding India's biggest nuclear power plant in Kudankulam.

It was not clear if the charges against Rosmah relate to 1MDB, but Rosmah's arrest came after three rounds of questioning by anti-graft agents over 1MDB, from which US

Najib faces 32 charges from money laundering to abuse of power and criminal breach of trust over billions of dollars that went missing from state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). He has denied any wrongdoing.

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Najib has plead not guilty.

Insults don't faze
me: Mahathir

NEW STRAITS TIMES ONLINE

Malaysia Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said he does not mind being insulted by anyone.

He said that insults directed at him do not affect him and that action should not be taken against those who launch the insults.

Dr Mahathir added that politicians must have a thick skin, as being insulted is part and parcel of being in politics.

"I don't mind being insulted by anybody, it's not going to affect me. Don't take any action. Politicians must be ready to accept being called all kinds of names."

"I (was) called names even when I was the prime minister before," he said after the launch of the 33rd Meeting of the Asean Committee on Disaster Management; and the 6th Asean Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management and Related Meetings yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was responding to the arrest of the younger brother of Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Lokman Noor Adam who was remanded for allegedly uploading a purportedly insulting photograph of Dr Mahathir.

Police were reported to have obtained the detention order of the brother of former Barisan Nasional candidate for the Sungai Kandis state seat by-election to assist in investigations under Section 4 (1) of the Sedition Act.

Lokman was quoted as saying that his brother was detained for sharing a photograph taken from his friend's Facebook account which allegedly defames Dr Mahathir.

Wife of Malaysia's ex-PM
charged with 17 offences

Najib also appears in court on graft charges

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The wife of former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak was charged with 17 money laundering offences yesterday, as anti-graft agents investigate billions of dollars missing from state coffers.

Rosmah Mansor, criticised for her extravagant lifestyle as first lady of Malaysia, and Najib, are at the centre of a wide-ranging graft probe launched after Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's stunning election victory in May.

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Najib has plead not guilty.

Najib also appeared at another court room in Kuala Lumpur yesterday for a pre-trial hearing, as he faces multiple charges in relation to about \$10.6 million allegedly transferred into his account from SRC International, a former unit of 1MDB. Najib has plead not guilty.

Pak urges US
to resume aid
Backs Taliban outreach

AFP, Washington

Pakistan pledged Wednesday to support negotiations with the Taliban to end Afghanistan's 17-year war as it asked the United States to restore military aid and stop blaming Islamabad for the extremists' strengths.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi visited Washington to explain the Afghanistan strategy of new Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has long advocated talks over military action with the Taliban and other Islamist insurgents.

A month after Washington cut \$300 million in military aid, Qureshi said he found Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "ready to listen" to Pakistan and said he was returning to Islamabad "slightly more hopeful" than before.

Pakistan had been the main supporter of the Taliban regime which imposed an austere brand of Islam on much of Afghanistan until a US military campaign launched after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The United States has pressed for years for Pakistan to crack down on militant groups involved in Afghanistan as well as virulently anti-Indian groups that operate virtually openly.

It says the insurgents have safe havens in Pakistan's border areas and links to its shadowy military establishment, accusations which Islamabad has repeatedly denied.

Trump has accused Pakistan of duplicity.

Qureshi said Pakistan would act "in good faith" to jumpstart diplomacy with the Taliban, whose representatives held a breakthrough meeting in July in Qatar with US representatives in a tentative bid to try to end the longest-running US war.



The seven Rohingya men to be deported sit as Indian and Myanmar security officials exchange documents before their deportation on India-Myanmar border at Moreh in the northeastern state of Manipur, India yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

POST-POLLS MALDIVES

Yameen tries to stay in
power, discredits result

TNN, New Delhi

With over a month and a half to go before he demits office, outgoing Maldives' President, Abdulla Yameen, is trying every trick in the book to discredit the recent elections and try to stay in power.

On Wednesday, even as former president Mohamed Nasheed tweeted that he would land in Male on November 1, regardless of the judicial strictures against him, Yameen's party, PPM, passed a resolution in a small group that they would not accept Ibrahim Solih as the new president of Maldives.

Reports are now surfacing that Yameen was given a large sum of money just before the elections. A report by Al Jazeera quotes confidential documents from Maldives' Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to say "Yameen received 22.5 million Maldivian rufiyaa (\$1.5 million) in hard currency days in advance of a contentious



presidential election."

The report quoted the FIU document as saying "president received the money in two instalments to a private bank account at the Maldives Islamic Bank."

If this is proved, it's not only against Maldives' laws, it could boomerang against Yameen with a new government a month away.

According to local reports, the PPM resolution against Solih was proposed by Ibrahim Muaz Ali, Yameen's spokesperson, and passed quickly on Tuesday night. Raajje TV, a Maldives news outlet said when asked why it was passed by so few people, Muaz told Raajje TV that they were the only people who were willing to show their faces to the media to speak out for their rights.

This comes a day after the PPM issued a statement protesting against "spike in threats, assaults and bodily harm as well as intimidation against the party's nationwide base" after the elections.

RAFALE DEAL ROW

BJP MP meets Rahul,
quits over 'corruption'

PTI, Mumbai

A day after he met Congress President Rahul Gandhi in Wardha, BJP lawmaker Ashish Deshmukh on Wednesday resigned from the Maharashtra Assembly, citing alleged corruption in the Rafale deal as the reason.

Deshmukh had on Tuesday announced his decision to quit as MLA and submitted his resignation to the Assembly on Wednesday.

Deshmukh, who represented the Katol constituency in the Vidarbha region, is likely to join the Congress which he had quit before the assembly polls four years ago, sources close to him said.

In a statement issued Wednesday evening, Deshmukh said schemes such as Make in India, Magnetic Maharashtra (the BJP-led state government's investment summit) and Skill India "showed no results on the ground".

"Also, there is mega corruption in the Rafale deal," he alleged.

Indian political parties have been gunning for Modi over the 2016 purchase of 36 Rafale planes from Dassault Aviation estimated to be worth \$8.7 billion, saying he had overpaid for the planes and had not been transparent.

In recent months, the opposition has questioned the government on the choice of billionaire Indian businessman Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence as Dassault's local partner instead of a state-run manufacturer with decades of experience.

REUTERS, New Delhi

The financial squeeze on India's farmers is set to worsen because of record high fuel prices and surging costs of fertilisers, posing a challenge to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an election that must be held by May.

The rise in input prices could not have come at worse time for farmers, already grappling with falling domestic product prices due to rising yields and abundant harvests.

Yet, the government has few easy options to respond. Rival global producers have complained about Indian state support and falling global farm product prices undermining export prospects.

Indian farmers voted overwhelmingly for Modi in 2014. But a fall in rural incomes risks damaging that support next year.

Thousands of farmers marched on New Delhi on Tuesday to demand better prices for their produce. Police responded with teargas and water cannon. Farmers suspended their protests after talks with officials that ran into early Wednesday morning.

But their demands and those of other agricultural workers, who together make up about half India's 1.3 billion people, have not gone away.

"Although we have decided to end our protest, we still believe that the government is not serious about addressing the concerns of the farmers,"

Anil Taran, national secretary of farmers body Bhartiya Kisan Union, said after the march.

Diesel prices have surged 26 percent this year, making tilling fields, harvesting and transporting crops expensive for India's 263 million farmers who mostly use diesel tractors.

Alongside rising diesel costs, prices of key fertilisers such as potash and phosphate have jumped

FARMERS AGITATION IN INDIA

Farmers backed Modi in 2014 vote, but support being eroded

Govt has few options amid weak export prospects



nearly 15 and 17 percent respectively in a year, as companies pass on the rise in global prices and the impact of the weak rupee to farmers.

"It's a double whammy for farmers who have to bear the brunt of lower crop prices and higher input costs," said Devinder Sharma, an independent food and trade policy analyst, saying this explained "why farmers' anger has come to the fore."

Diesel demand is rising as farmers have started harvesting summer crops. After tilling, they will plant wheat and rapeseed, the main winter crops.

Union official Taran said the government needed to prop up commodity prices and keep a lid on farmers' costs to support the agricultural industry, which accounts for about 16 percent of India's \$2.6 trillion economy.

"Because of higher diesel prices I need to spend nearly 20 percent more on harvesting soybean but soybean prices have crashed this year," said Uttam Jagdale, a farmer from Pune, about 150 km (94 miles) south of Mumbai.

Nilesh Sable, a cane farmer from Sangli in the western state of Maharashtra, said fertiliser prices were rising each month.

Fertiliser firms say they have little choice but to pass on at least some extra costs due to a sharp fall in the rupee and a 20 percent rise in international potash and phosphate prices.

"Still, we are not passing the entire burden to farmers," said an official with a state-run fertiliser company, asking not to be named in line with government policy.

Greater farm efficiency is partly to blame. Mechanised farming, high-yielding seed varieties and increased use of pesticides have pushed up harvests. Output of most crops has soared to record levels each year.

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