

NEWSIN
brief

Australia may move
embassy to Jerusalem

AFP, Sydney

Australia is considering moving its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced. Morrison called a press conference to say he was "open-minded" to proposals to formally recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Microsoft co-founder
Paul Allen dies

AFP, San Francisco

Billionaire Paul Allen, who founded US software giant Microsoft with Bill Gates in the 1970s, died Monday after his latest battle with cancer. He was 65. Allen died just two weeks after publicly revealing that the non-Hodgkin's lymphoma he fought into remission nine years ago had returned. The incurable cancer affects white blood cells.

Iran troops abducted
on Pakistan border

AFP, Tehran

Fourteen Iranian security personnel, including Revolutionary Guards intelligence officers, were abducted on the volatile southeastern border with Pakistan yesterday. Sistan-Baluchistan province has long been a flashpoint, with Baluchi separatists and jihadists based in Pakistan regularly attacking Iranian security posts.

Russia says Idlib deal
on despite setback

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday said a deal to create a buffer zone in Syria's Idlib was going ahead, despite jihadists missing a deadline to leave the area the day before. The accord is a last-ditch effort to stave off a regime onslaught on Idlib, the largest rebel stronghold left in war-ravaged Syria.

DEFAMATION SUIT AGAINST TRUMP

US judge dismisses
porn star's case

AFP, Los Angeles

President Donald Trump scored a legal victory Monday against porn star Stormy Daniels when a federal US judge rejected her defamation suit against him.

Daniels -- whose real name is Stephanie Clifford -- still has a separate lawsuit against the president linked to \$130,000 in hush money she was paid by Trump's lawyer shortly before the November 2016 presidential election to keep quiet about an alleged affair.

US District Judge S James Otero in Los Angeles tossed out the defamation suit Daniels filed earlier this year after Trump claimed on Twitter that the adult film actress had invented threats to silence her over her claims the pair slept together more than a decade ago.

"The Court agrees with Mr Trump's argument because the tweet in question constitutes 'rhetorical hyperbole' normally associated with politics and public discourse in the United States," Otero wrote in his ruling.

Otero ruled that the billionaire Trump is entitled to have his lawyers' fees paid as part of the ruling. The amount will be determined later.

Daniels sued after Trump tweeted in April about her release of a sketch of a man she said warned her in a Las Vegas parking lot not to talk about their tryst.

"A sketch years later about a nonexistent man," Trump tweeted. "A total con job, playing the Fake News Media for Fools (but they know it!)," Trump tweeted.

'VOCATIONAL EDUCATION' CENTRES IN XINJIANG

China rolls out PR push

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday issued an ardent defence of the alleged mass internment of minorities in its far west Xinjiang region, with a regional official insisting that authorities are preventing terrorism through "vocational education" centres.

Beijing has sought to counter a global outcry against the facilities with a series of op-eds and interviews and a roll out of new regulations that retroactively codify the use of a system of extra-judicial "re-education" camps in Xinjiang.

Up to one million ethnic Uighurs and other mostly Muslim Turkic minorities are believed to be held in such centres, according to estimates cited by a United Nations panel.

Former inmates have said they found themselves incarcerated for transgressions such as wearing long beards and face veils or sharing Islamic holiday greetings on social media, a process that echoes the decades of brutal thought reform under Mao Zedong.

'Perfect storm' of hunger awaits

Warns UN, says Zero Hunger world by 2030 a distant dream as conflicts, climate change and an economic slowdown rave on

AFP, Rome

A potent combination of hunger, climate change and man-made conflicts are creating a "perfect storm", the head of the UN's food arm yesterday warned in a call to action on World Food Day.

"You've got a nightmare, the perfect storm heading your way," David Beasley, World Food Programme (WFP) chief, said in a speech in Rome, where the United Nations' food agencies are headquartered.

The UN aims to achieve a Zero Hunger world by 2030, but faces three obstacles: conflicts, climate change and an economic slowdown.

Some 821 million, or one of every nine people on the planet, suffered from hunger last year

An estimated 155 million children under five years old are chronically malnourished



Beasley said the battle was an urgent one. "Children are dying at a rate of every five to ten seconds" from hunger or malnutrition, he said.

Food is being wasted both during the production process and in people's kitchens.

"The answer is not in Rome alone, it's in your homes. What are you going to do about it?" he asked.

It is not a problem wealthier countries can simply ignore, for it has a knock-on effect on them in terms of the migration crisis.

"For every one percent increase in hunger, there's a two percent increase in migration," Beasley said.

Some 821 million people, or one of every nine people on the planet, suffered from hunger last year, marking the third consecutive annual increase, according to the UN's latest hunger report.

An estimated 155 million children under five years old are chronically malnourished, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), while

micronutrient deficiencies, dubbed the "hidden hunger", affects over two billion people worldwide.

At the same time, over 600 million people are obese.

The costs to society of the "global pandemic" of obesity are enormous -- as expensive as armed conflicts and smoking, FAO head Jose Graziano da Silva said.

"International solidarity appears to be cooling," warned Pope Francis in a speech delivered by a Vatican representative.

He warned institutions leading the fight against hunger not to "study the roots of (poor people's) misery" and merely respond with "impressive publications destined only to enlarge library catalogues".

"When it is a question of effectively confronting the causes of hunger, grandiose declarations" are not enough, he said.

"The struggle against hunger urgently demands generous financing, the abolition of trade barriers and, above all, greater resilience in the face of climate change, economic crises and warfare."

'Inspired by God'

Says actress who helped trigger India's #MeToo movement; three organisations of media professionals seek resignation of MJ Akbar

STAR REPORT

The Bollywood actress who helped trigger the #MeToo movement in India challenging sexual harassment and abuse sees it as part of her religious education after an experience 10 years ago she said effectively ended her career.

"I feel God used me to start something which had to happen," Tanushree Dutta told Reuters. "All these women had this buried deep in their hearts out of shame."

Dutta, who said she was inspired by Christianity, Buddhism, yoga and the #MeToo movement in the United States, said last month that prominent actor Nana Patekar had sexually harassed her on the set of a movie in 2008.

Patekar has denied wrongdoing. Dutta said Patekar, 67, had demanded she do intimate dance steps with him in one song in the Hindi-language romantic comedy "Horn OK Please". When she refused, she said, members of a far right-wing Hindu group attacked her car while

she was in it, including jumping on the roof and trying to smash the windscreen.

Dutta, who walked out of the movie, went public with the allegations the same day, but was threatened with legal action by the Hindu group and felt so shamed by those questioning her story



and by the way the Indian media treated her that she left Bollywood altogether and went to live in the US.

Other than a few bit parts, she hasn't worked in a movie since. "All of that disgusted me - it took my faith and confidence from the industry," she said in an interview. "I didn't want to

'It comes and goes'
Trump says on climate change

AFP, Macon

President Donald Trump, a longtime climate change skeptic, said Monday on a tour of hurricane damage in the southern United States that "something" is happening -- but that the change is not permanent.

"There is something there, man-made or not. There is something there. It is going to go back and forth," Trump said while visiting Georgia, which was damaged by Hurricane Michael last week.

Trump, who earlier inspected devastation left by the storm in Florida, said "we have been hit by the weather, there is no question about it."

However, he noted that there had been violent hurricanes, causing widespread destruction, in the past.

"Fifty years ago, it was brutal. (The) 1890s were brutal. You have different times," he said.

"The one that they say was worse, two or three (times) worse -- one was in the 1890s and one exactly 50 years ago. Winds were 200 miles (322 kilometers) an hour. Who knows? That's what the numbers are."

Trump in the past has dismissed claims -- backed by an overwhelming international consensus of scientists -- that greenhouse gases caused by human activity are responsible for a rapidly warming planet, triggering ever more extreme weather.

He has even dismissed international pushes to reduce greenhouse gases as a hoax invented by rival China to cripple US industrial might.

On Sunday, Trump said in an interview with CBS that he does not consider climate change made-up, but is not convinced that human activity, such as industry and agriculture, is to blame.



UK PM rallies
ministers on
eve of crucial
Brexit summit

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May gathered her divided cabinet yesterday to seek their support for her approach to Brexit, the day before she addresses EU leaders at a crucial Brussels summit.

Negotiations on Britain's withdrawal from the European Union have stalled ahead of the summit, which had been billed as the deadline for a draft deal before Brexit day on March 29.

May is still struggling to reconcile conflicting demands from Brussels and her own MPs, raising fears of a chaotic and damaging divorce.

Several of her senior ministers reportedly met late Monday to coordinate their approach over takeaway pizza, before yesterday's regular cabinet meeting focused this week on Brexit.

Media reports this week-end suggested several Brexit-supporting ministers were considering resigning if May compromised too much with Brussels.

But with a deal looking unlikely this week after the latest round of talks broke down on Sunday, the immediate threat of walk-outs appears to have reduced.

The prime minister will still go to the summit, where she will make her pitch to the other 27 EU leaders before they have dinner without her to talk about the next steps in the Brexit negotiations.

Another summit has been pencilled in for mid-November, although some leaders have said it will only go ahead if there is progress this week.

US Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo (L) meets with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh, yesterday. Earlier, Pompeo met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman (inset). Pompeo held talks with Saudi leaders yesterday seeking answers about the disappearance of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

PHOTO: AFP



Vaccine scandal
China slaps
\$1.3b fines on
pharma firm

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities yesterday slapped penalties totaling a whopping \$1.3 billion on a pharmaceutical company over a vaccine scandal that fuelled public fears of domestically-made medicine.

The massive fine targeted Changchun Changsheng Biotechnology company, based in northeast Jilin province, over faulty rabies vaccine.

Although the suspect rabies vaccines did not enter the market, the firm's chairwoman and 14 other people were arrested in connection with the scandal in July, while more than a dozen national, provincial and local officials have been sacked.

CHALLENGE TO MALDIVES ELECTION RESULT

In a blow to Yameen, court
rejects his secret witnesses

AFP, Colombo

The Maldives' top court yesterday rejected three "secret" witnesses offered by President Abdulla Yameen in his petition to have his September election defeat annulled, in what is likely a major blow to his case.

The refusal came as the Supreme Court concluded its hearings, which also saw Yameen allege disappearing ink was used on ballot papers, and said it would deliver its verdict at an unspecified later date.

Lawyers for Yameen, who was beaten in the election despite all his main rivals being in prison or in exile, had said the three unnamed witnesses would reveal how the vote was rigged.

The country's independent Elections Commission (EC) through its lawyers argued Yameen's petition was based on false allegations and should be dismissed.

Local media also reported four of the five election commissioners have fled the coun-

try and sought refuge in neighbouring Sri Lanka following death threats after Yameen lost the election.

Despite Yameen's main competitors being out of the way and the media in his pocket, he was beaten by Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, the joint candidate of the beleaguered opposition.

Under pressure from abroad, Yameen initially conceded defeat and said he would stand down on November 17, but then last week filed his petition -- and despite the threat of sanctions from US, EU and India.

Yameen's lawyer Mohamed Saleem told the court that the printer of ballot papers of coating them with an unnamed substance that made votes marked in Yameen's box disappear.

Counting officials also allegedly carried secret pens, in the form of rings on their fingers, which they used to mark ballots for the opposition. Opposition lawyer Hisan Hussain said the entire challenge was based on "pure conspiracy theories".