

NEWSIN
brief

2,000 arrested over
India temple protests

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police have rounded up more than 2,000 people for stopping women from entering a flashpoint Hindu shrine in defiance of a Supreme Court order, officials said yesterday. Hindu hardliners prevented women aged 10 to 50 from reaching the Sabarimala temple complex in Kerala state over the last week -- the first time the temple has opened since the court ended a longstanding ban on women of menstruating age from worshipping there.

France expels
Iranian diplomat

REUTERS, Paris

France has expelled an Iranian diplomat in response to a failed plot to carry out a bomb attack at a rally near Paris organised by an exiled Iranian opposition group, diplomatic and security sources say. France's foreign ministry said on Oct 2 there was no doubt the Iranian intelligence ministry had been behind the plot against the June 30 rally. It subsequently froze assets belonging to Tehran's intelligence services and two Iranian nationals.

Myanmar journos get
bail in incitement case

AFP, Yangon

Three Myanmar journalists accused of incitement were granted bail yesterday but must continue to fight the case involving a close confidant of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In their article, published earlier this month by Eleven Media, they criticised the financial management of Yangon's government run by Phylo Min Thein, the chief minister for the city and a staunch Suu Kyi ally. Executive editors Kyaw Zaw Lin and Nayi Min and chief reporter Phylo Wai Win stand by the report, which raised questions about funding for the city's bus network.



Rahul Gandhi, president of India's main opposition Congress party, attends a protest near the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) headquarters in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

PHOTO:
REUTERS

'CBI chief's ouster won't help'

Rahul warns Modi, says move aims at derailing French jet deal probe

AFP, TIMES OF INDIA

India's main opposition staged nationwide protests yesterday, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of removing the head of the premier investigation agency in order to scuttle a probe into a controversial jet deal.

Congress and other opposition parties have accused Modi of removing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) chief Alok Verma this week because he wanted to investigate a 2016 deal to buy 36 Rafale jets from France.

Rahul Gandhi, the scion of India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and president of the Congress party, was briefly taken to a Delhi police station after leading a march by hundreds of supporters to the CBI headquarters.

Demonstrations were also held in other cities including Bangalore, Mumbai and Chandigarh, where police fired water cannons to break up a march.

Upon leaving the police station, Rahul launched an attack on Modi. "PM can run, he can hide but in the end, truth will be revealed. Removing the CBI director will not help. PM's act was one of panic."

The government suspended Verma and his second-in-command Rakesh Asthana on Wednesday, pending an inquiry. The pair have accused each other of taking bribes.

Congress says Verma was asked to go only because he wanted to investigate the Rafale jet deal -- which critics say

unfairly profited Indian billionaire Anil Ambani.

"The prime minister acted against the CBI director as a result of panic and as a result of fear because he has helped Mr Ambani," Gandhi said as he left the police station.

Earlier, while addressing a gathering, Rahul held the PM accountable for the controversy. "Every institution in India is being ruined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said, adding "Congress will not allow 'chowkidaar' (watchman) to do 'chori' (theft)."

Home Affairs Minister Rajnath Singh accused Congress of picking up on "non-issues". The government has insisted it replaced the CBI chiefs to maintain the "institutional integrity" of the agency which handles high-profile cases.

The Supreme Court, while hearing a petition yesterday from Verma against his ouster, ordered that the investigation into his case be completed within two weeks.

It also said interim CBI chief M Nageswara Rao would be restricted from taking any major policy decisions.

In his petition Verma said "CBI's autonomy was being compromised as certain investigations into high functionaries do not take the direction that may be desirable to the government".

When the Congress party last held power in 2013, a Supreme Court judge described the CBI as a "caged parrot" because its inquiries are constrained by the ruling party of the day.

Congress stage nationwide
protests; Rahul briefly
detained
SC tells CVC to complete
probe within two weeks

14 children
stabbed at
China school

AFP, Beijing

A knife-wielding woman attacked and injured 14 children at a kindergarten in China's southwestern Sichuan province yesterday, authorities said.

The 39-year-old assailant used a kitchen knife to slashed students while they were returning to the classroom after morning exercises, said the Banan district public security bureau in Chongqing city on its official social media account.

Images and video footage posted by local media online show children in blood-soaked clothes, some with knife wounds on their face.

After police rushed to the scene, children were evacuated for medical treatment. The woman who carried out the attack is currently in police custody and an investigation is ongoing.

Ties at 'historic
turning point'

Xi, Abe hail new era for China, Japan

REUTERS, Beijing

China and Japan yesterday pledged to forge closer ties as both countries stood together at an "historic turning point", signing a broad range of agreements including a \$30 billion currency swap pact, amid rising trade tensions with Washington.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also agreed the two countries would work together to achieve denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula.

The pacts were reached on Abe's three-day visit to Beijing as the two neighbours looked to carve out new areas of cooperation and seek ways to promote trust, which has been fragile at times since diplomatic relations resumed in 1972.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said 500 business deals worth \$18 billion had been signed between Chinese and Japanese companies during the visit, a reflection of the "bright prospects" for cooperation between the two countries.

"From competition to co-existence, Japan and China bilateral relations have entered a new phase. Hand in hand with Premier Li, I would like to advance our ties forward," Abe told reporters after the pair met yesterday morning.

Both countries are neighbours and partners, and will not

Countries strike
deals worth at
least \$48b
Japan, China to
seek peace on
Korean peninsula



become a threat to each other, Abe said after meeting with President Xi Jinping yesterday in the first full-scale Sino-Japanese summit since 2011.

"With President Xi Jinping, I would like to carve out a new era for China and Japan," Abe said.

Xi said bilateral ties had returned to the right track and China would ensure the positive momentum continues, according to state media.

"That is worth cherishing by both sides," Xi said.

Both sides should undertake more in-depth strategic dialogue, Xi said, adding that exchanges between ordinary Japanese and Chinese people should also be stepped up to foster deeper mutual understanding.

Abe returned to power in 2012 when Sino-Japanese ties were in tatters due to a feud over East China Sea islands, and the territorial dispute remains a key source of friction between the two countries.

The move to boost economic ties came as China and the United States slap tit-for-tat tariffs on each other in recent months. Japan is at risk as it exports to China manufacturing equipment and electronic parts, which are used to make finished goods for the United States and other markets.

CIVIL WAR VICTIMS

Lankan refugees to
return from India

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, Bangalore

Thousands of Sri Lankan refugees living in India are ready to return to their homeland decades after fleeing civil war, according to a rights group that said returnees will receive a plot of land and other assistance.

Nearly 4,000 of more than 62,000 refugees living in camps in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu have registered to return in the coming months, said Ashok Xavier at the non-profit Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation.

Each family will receive a cash grant, livelihood assistance, a small plot of land, and a home, he said.

They will also get help acquiring documentation needed to claim these benefits and establish citizenship, he added.

"For those who want to go back, it will be a safe, sustainable and voluntary return," said Xavier.

"And it won't be to another camp, but to their own home," he said in Bangkok, on the sidelines of a refugee conference.

Thousands of people were killed and tens of thousands uprooted from their homes in a war that lasted nearly three decades. Most were Tamils, an ethnic and religious Hindu minority.

Many sought refuge in neighbouring India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The conflict ended in 2009.

Thousands of acres of land taken over during the war are still held by government forces, said a report of Human Rights Watch.

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena has said that all civilian lands held by the state in the northern and eastern provinces would be released by December 31.



Palestinian demonstrators react during a protest calling for lifting the blockade on Gaza, at the Israel-Gaza border fence in Gaza, yesterday. Inset, An injured protester is being moved out of the battle field by fellow protesters. Four Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli fire in yesterday's clashes bringing the death toll to 212 since the protests began on March 30, according to figures collated by AFP.

PHOTO: AFP



Man arrested from Florida

Two more Trump critic suspicious package amid outrage

AFP, New York

The US government yesterday announced a suspect had been arrested in connection with 12 suspicious packages and pipe bombs sent to critics of Donald Trump in a days-long spree that has inflamed the United States ahead of key midterm elections.

A Department of Justice spokeswoman announced the arrest yesterday morning, saying a news conference would be held at 2:30pm (1830 GMT).

US media said the suspect was taken into custody in Florida, where a huge nationwide man-hunt mobilising hundreds of agents, had reportedly concentrated in recent hours.

Since Monday homemade bombs and other suspected explosive devices have been addressed to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Hollywood megastar Robert De Niro and a litany of figures loathed by the US president's supporters.

Early yesterday, an 11th package to Cory Booker, a New Jersey senator often touted as a Democratic presidential hope, was intercepted in Florida, the FBI confirmed.

A 12th package, identified by police as a pipe bomb similar to others found across the country, was found at a US Post Office in Manhattan and the bomb squad were dispatched, New York police said.

James Clapper, among a string of former intelligence chiefs critical of Trump, was the addressee of the 12th package, sent care of CNN.

On Wednesday, the news network evacuated its New York bureau after a similar package was found in the mail room addressed to another frequent CNN guest, former CIA director John Brennan.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle have branded the packages -- intercepted in New York, Maryland, Florida, Delaware and Los Angeles -- domestic terrorism, but Trump has come under fire for his response.

On Friday, Trump accused the 'Bomb stuff' of shifting focus from US election.

Even before his tweet, Trump came under criticism from the left for tempering calls for unity in the wake of the attacks, by lashing out at the press for stirring up "anger."

MAIL BOMB SCARE IN US



Schoolchildren among 20
dead in Jordan flash floods

REUTERS, Amman

Rescuers combed the shores of Jordan's Dead Sea early yesterday, searching for survivors, after flash floods killed at least 20 people, most of them children on a school outing.

Thirty-seven people were rescued in a major operation involving helicopters and divers searching for survivors of the floods, which swept through valleys to the shores of the area, the lowest point on earth, civil defence sources said.

Among the dead were three Iraqis and a 20-year-old woman who accompanied the children on their school bus, a civil defence source said.

Police chief Brigadier General Farid al Sharaa told state television the torrential rains swept away a bus carrying 44 children and teachers who were on a school trip picnicking in the popular destination.

The national flag was lowered to half mast in mourning as public opinion and politicians began raising questions in local media outlets about the preparedness of emergencies services to cope with such a disaster.

Prime Minister Omar Razzaz said it appeared the school had broken regulations by going ahead with the trip, which had been banned in the Dead Sea

area because of bad weather.

Health Minister Ghazi al Zibn said most of the injured had left the hospital in the area near the Dead Sea. At least eight people were still missing, a medical source said.

Families of victims had been searching the rugged area after search teams suspended operations overnight for a few hours, a witness said.

A bridge on one of the cliffs of the Dead Sea collapsed under the force of the rains, the first such after the end of summer.

Neighbouring Israel sent search-and-rescue helicopters to assist, an Israeli military statement said. The team, dispatched at Amman's request, was operating on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea.

A Jordanian official said Israel had offered to help and the kingdom requested a helicopter with the technology to find buried bodies in mud that would accelerate the searches.

The kingdom, which shares the longest border with Israel and have a common peace treaty, has a long history of cooperation with its neighbour in natural disasters.

Jordan helped Israel in 2016 with fire-fighting equipment after a rash of fires that burned for days, straining Israel firefighters.

US formally
invites Putin

REUTERS, Tbilisi

The White House has formally invited President Vladimir Putin to Washington, US National Security Advisor John Bolton said yesterday, returning to an idea that was put on hold in July amid anger in the US over the prospect of such a summit.

President Donald Trump held a summit with Putin in Helsinki, the Finnish capital, and then issued Putin an invitation to visit Washington in the autumn. But that was postponed after Trump was accused of cozying up to the Kremlin.

"We have invited President Putin to Washington," Bolton said at a news conference during a visit to ex-Soviet Georgia, days after meeting Putin and senior security officials in Moscow.

It was not immediately clear if Putin had accepted the invitation, which is for next year.

Bolton, in a separate interview with Reuters, strongly criticised Russian foreign policy, saying Moscow's behaviour on the world stage was one of the reasons Washington had imposed sanctions on Russia and was now considering imposing more.

"It will be helpful if they (the Russians) stop interfering in our election ... get out of Crimea and the Donbas in Ukraine ... stop using illegal chemical weapons to conduct assassination attempts against Russian exiles in the West, and if they would be less intrusive in the Middle East," he said.

Russia denies meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, sending soldiers and equipment to eastern Ukraine, and has rejected Western allegations it was behind the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Britain.