

NEWSIN brief

Indonesia finds faults in two 737-MAX jets

AFP, Jakarta
Indonesia's transport ministry yesterday said it had found "minor" faults in two other Boeing 737-MAX 8 jets, including a cockpit indicator display problem which an analyst said may be similar to one reported in the crashed Lion Air Jet. Authorities were yesterday analysing data from a recovered black box that may help explain why flight JT 610 plummeted into the Java Sea, killing 189 people on Monday.

UNGA urges US to end Cuba embargo

REUTERS, United Nations
The United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted its 27th annual resolution calling for an end to the US economic embargo on Cuba after a failed bid by Washington to amend the text to push Cuba to improve its human rights record. The UN vote can carry political weight, but only the US Congress can lift the more than 50-year-old embargo. The United States and Israel voted against the resolution, 189 countries voted in favor and Ukraine and Moldova did not vote.

Shelling kills eight in Syria's Idlib

REUTERS, Beirut
At least eight people were killed by Syrian government shelling of the rebel-held Idlib province yesterday, according to a monitoring group -- the highest daily toll since a Russian-Turkish demilitarisation zone was set up around the region. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the deaths occurred in the town of Jarjanaz, which lies on the inner edge of the 15-20 km (9-13 mile) deep zone agreed in September.



Israeli troops stand in front of Palestinian demonstrators during a protest against Israeli land seizures for Jewish settlements, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. Inset, Gazans react to tear gas and live fire during protests at the Israel-Gaza border fence in the southern Gaza Strip. Brazil's far-right President-elect Jair Bolsonaro on Thursday confirmed reports that the Latin American giant will move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

PHOTO: REUTERS



LANKA CIVIL WAR

Court orders arrest of military chief

AFP, Colombo
A Sri Lankan court yesterday ordered the arrest of the country's top military officer over the abduction and murder of 11 people during the Tamil civil war.

Colombo Fort magistrate Ranga Dissanayake reprimanded police investigators for failing to act on a previous order to detain Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne. "The court ordered that the admiral be arrested before November 9," a court official told AFP. "If they fail, there should be action against the police officer handling the case."

The magistrate wants police to arrest Wijegunaratne, the chief of the defence staff, for allegedly shielding a navy officer responsible for abductions and killings.

Police told the court the admiral had protected Chandana Prasad Hettiarachchi, a navy intelligence officer who is the main suspect in the killing of 11 men between 2008 and 2009.

They are believed to have been murdered while being illegally held by the navy. Their bodies were never found but Hettiarachchi was arrested in August.

There have been persistent allegations that senior military personnel and figures loyal to the then president Mahinda Rajapakse were responsible for a number of high-profile murders.

Several military intelligence officers face prosecution over the assassination of a newspaper editor and for orchestrating attacks on other journalists and dissidents during Rajapakse's presidency.

Troops crushed Tamil separatists in 2009 ending the decades-long civil war.

Gunmen kill 7 Coptic Christians in Egypt

AFP, Cairo
At least seven Coptic Christians were killed yesterday when gunmen opened fire on their bus in central Egypt, the province's bishop told AFP.

The incident took place when the vehicle was heading towards the Saint Samuel Coptic Christian monastery near Minya, a city about 270km south of the capital, Cairo.

The archbishop of Minya told Reuters news agency that at least seven people were killed and 14 wounded in the attack. Church spokesperson Bous Halim told The Associated Press news agency the death toll was likely to rise.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi vowed to push ahead with a campaign to crush militants after the gun attack and offered condolences for the victims.

"I wish a speedy recovery to the injured and assert our determination to fight dark terrorism and to pursue the perpetrators," Sisi said on his official Twitter account.

In May 2017, at least 28 people were killed and dozens more wounded when attackers opened fire on a vehicle carrying Coptic Christians to the complex. The IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

IS has repeatedly targeted Copts, a Christian minority that make up about 10 percent of Egypt's estimated 99 million people, in recent years.

In December 2017 an IS jihadist killed nine people in an attack on a church in a south Cairo suburb.

Speaker defies president

Summons parliament on Nov 7 as MP tells of defection cash offer

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka's speaker yesterday summoned parliament to meet next week in defiance of the president as a constitutional crisis darkened with an MP saying he was offered millions of dollars and a minister's post to defect to a rival camp.

With the Indian Ocean nation torn between rival prime ministers Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mahinda Rajapakse, speaker Karu Jayasuriya said he could no longer ignore demands for parliament to meet to end the week-old feud.

Amid growing international concern over the standoff, Jayasuriya convened parliament to meet next Wednesday.

President Maithripala Sirisena suspended parliament until November 16 after sacking Wickremesinghe as premier and replacing him with former authoritarian president Rajapakse.

Wickremesinghe has refused to accept the dismissal and remained bunkered at the prime minister's official residence for the past week amid nearly daily twists in the saga.

Sirisena at first lifted the suspension, but with observers saying his candidate Rajapakse did not have enough support to win a parliamentary vote, the president's party said late Thursday that the assembly would remain shut.

"The speaker met a majority of MPs at



a committee room today and promised he will open parliament on November 7," Jayasuriya's spokesman told AFP.

Some 118 of the 225 lawmakers attended the meeting in a new sign that Sirisena would not win a vote on Rajapakse, whose decade as president up to 2015 was marked by the brutal end of

the Tamil civil war and corruption claims. Meanwhile, a senior member of Wickremesinghe's United National Party, Range Bandara, said he was offered \$2.8 million and a ministry to switch sides and would go to the anti-graft commission.

"I have a phone recording of a former minister in the Rajapakse camp trying to approach me," Bandara told reporters. "A broker offered me the \$2.8 million and the ministry of law and order."

Another Wickremesinghe loyalist, deputy minister Ranjan Ramanayake has already accused China of financing the defection of MPs to the Rajapakse-Sirisena camp. China has strongly rejected the claims.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) party, which has seven lawmakers, said its members had also rejected offers to join the Sirisena-Rajapakse camp.

Wickremesinghe's party says that the president wants to shut parliament for as long as possible to give himself more time to secure votes for Rajapakse.

SRI LANKA CRISIS



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday. China promised to support Pakistan's economy yesterday as Imran Khan told of his country's "very difficult" economic situation amid a burgeoning financial crisis. Pakistan's foreign reserves have plunged 42 percent since the start of the year and now stand at about \$7.8 billion, or less than two months of import cover.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Hope' dies in Yemen

AGENCIES

News of death is nothing new in Yemen where starvation and disease kill a Yemeni child in every 10 minutes. But few deaths do shake us, like the death of Aylan Kurdi whose lifeless body on the shore of Turkey brought global attention to the migrant crisis triggered by brutal wars in Middle East.

Last week, The New York Times posted a photo of a starving girl, 7-year-old Amal Hussain, lying silently on a hospital bed in northern Yemen.

The haunted look in the eyes of the girl drew an impassioned response from readers. Amal is Arabic for "hope," and some readers expressed hope that the graphic image of her distress could help galvanize attention on the war.

On Thursday, Amal's family said she had died at a ragged refugee camp four miles from the hospital. "My heart is broken," said her mother, Mariam Ali. But she feared her other children may follow

Starvation and disease kill a Yemeni child every 10 minutes
1.8 million children malnourished



Amal too. Geert Cappelaere, Middle East director for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), yesterday described "heart-breaking" scenes of emaciated children in hospitals.

"We have evidence that today in Yemen every 10 minutes a child under the age of 5 is dying from preventable diseases and severe acute malnutrition," he told Reuters from Hodeidah.

The United Nations says about 14 million people, or half Yemen's population, could soon be on the brink of famine in a man-made disaster. Already 1.8 million

Yemeni children are malnourished, Cappelaere said.

Amal was discharged from the hospital last week, still sick, to make way for new patients. The family took Amal back home, to a hut fashioned from straw and plastic sheeting, at a camp where relief agencies do provide some help, including sugar and rice. But it was not enough to save Amal.

Her condition deteriorated, with frequent bouts of vomiting and diarrhea, her mother said. On Oct. 26, three days after she was discharged from the hospital, she died.

Khashoggi was 'dangerous'

Saudi crown prince allegedly told Kushner, Bolton after the journo went missing causing global uproar

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman described slain journalist Jamal Khashoggi as a "dangerous Islamist" after his disappearance weeks ago, according to US media reports.

The reported phone call with President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and National Security Adviser John Bolton allegedly took place before Saudi Arabia publicly acknowledged that Khashoggi had been killed in its consulate in Istanbul.

Citing people familiar with the call, the New York Times and the Washington Post reported that the crown prince said Khashoggi belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood - outlawed by Riyadh and its Arab allies - and urged Kushner and Bolton to preserve the US-Saudi alliance.

Saudi Arabia has denied the media reports. Prince Salman deplored the killing and refutes all allegations against him. A critic of Mohammed bin Salman's reform programme in Saudi Arabia,



Tensions as BJP key leader killed in J&K

AFP, Srinagar

Indian authorities imposed a curfew and deployed extra troops Friday in a remote district of disputed Kashmir after gunmen killed a local leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and his brother.

The gunmen shot dead Anil Parihar, the BJP state secretary for Kashmir, and his brother from close range on Thursday night as they walked home after closing the family bookshop in Kishtwar, police said.

The incident triggered protests in the town in the south of the Muslim-majority state. Kishtwar has a mixed Hindu-Muslim population and activists from the Hindu-dominated party took to the streets to demand action.

Authorities imposed a curfew and ordered extra military patrols to prevent violence.

"The situation is under control and an investigation into the incident is going on," Dilbag Singh, director general of police, told AFP.

Fearing sectarian tensions, Muslim leaders used mosque speakers yesterday to also demand the attackers be found.

Don't test our patience

Warns Pak military after being threatened by hardliners; mobile networks shut in major cities to quell protest

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's powerful military warned yesterday that its patience had been thoroughly tested after being threatened by Islamist hardliners enraged at the acquittal of a Christian woman for blasphemy, as thousands joined mass protests.

Spokesman Asif Ghafoor said the armed forces' tolerance had been pushed after hardliners called for a mutiny against its top brass earlier this week in response to the Supreme Court's dismissal of blasphemy charges against Asia Bibi - ending her eight-year ordeal on death row.

Mobile services in major cities across Pakistan remained down throughout the day as religious parties took to the streets for another day of demonstrations against the Supreme Court's decision.

"We are tolerating remarks against us but action can be taken according to the law and

constitution," the spokesman told state media, saying he hoped that the dispute "would be resolved through negotiations peacefully".

"Don't force us into taking action," he headed. Blasphemy is a massively inflammatory charge in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even unproven allegations of insulting Islam and its Prophet Mohammed can provoke death at the hands of vigilantes.

The protests are being largely led by the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan party, which is known for its hard-line stance on blasphemy issues.

Officials said talks with the protesters were ongoing ahead of nationwide protests that kicked off after Friday prayers - the holiest day of the Islamic week and a time when the size of demonstrations can often swell.

TLP leaders, however, have said negotiations with authorities were "deadlocked" and vowed to continue holding sit-ins.

BLASPHEMY ROW

