

NEWSIN brief

4 Israeli cops injured by knifeman

AFP, Jerusalem

A man wielding a knife entered an Israeli border police base in annexed east Jerusalem provoking a scuffle in which four officers were wounded, police said. The assailant was seriously wounded as he was overpowered by officers during the rare attack inside a security force base late on Wednesday.

Xi arrives in PNG ahead of APEC summit

AFP, Port Moresby

President Xi Jinping yesterday arrived in Papua New Guinea for a much-awaited state visit ahead of an Asia-Pacific summit he is expected to dominate. Xi touched down in Port Moresby, where he was greeted on the tarmac by tribesmen and women in traditional attire, complete with feather headdresses.

India braces for Cyclone Gaja

AFP, New Delhi

Tens of thousands of rescue personnel were on standby and many more people were evacuated in southern India yesterday as authorities braced for the arrival of Cyclone Gaja. Schools were shut and fishing barred on the coastline of Tamil Nadu state in anticipation of the storm packing wind speeds of 80-90 kilometres per hour gusting to 100 kph, authorities said.

Stormy Daniels lawyer arrested in Los Angeles

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Attorney Michael Avenatti, who represents adult film star Stormy Daniels in her legal battles with US President Donald Trump, was arrested in Los Angeles on Wednesday on suspicion of domestic violence, a police spokesman said. Police said no further details were immediately available, but Avenatti was released on bail after he was formally booked in the case.



A dustbin is thrown towards Sri Lanka's parliament Speaker Karu Jayasuriya during a parliament session in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. Parliament descended into chaos with MPs swinging punches and throwing projectiles a day after legislators voted the "purported" prime minister out of office. PHOTO: REUTERS

Lanka PM crisis deepens

Parliament descends into chaos as rival MPs throw punches, projectiles; Speaker announces country now has no govt

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's political crisis yesterday descended into farce with MPs throwing punches and projectiles in parliament, a day after voting the disputed prime minister out of office and leaving the country without a government.

Meanwhile, police said tens of thousands of people took part in a rally in Colombo in support of Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose sacking as prime minister plunged the Indian Ocean nation into turmoil almost three weeks ago.

"It was difficult to make out immediately who was hitting whom, but several were hurt, but not seriously," an official in parliament told AFP. "The speaker adjourned the House till tomorrow (Friday)."

The official said an MP from toppled premier Mahinda Rajapakse's party injured himself trying to rip out the speaker's microphone and had to be taken to hospital with a bleeding hand.

Parliament reconvened on Wednesday and lawmakers approved a motion of no-

confidence in what they called Rajapakse's "purported" cabinet, also passing motions declaring Sirisena's moves illegal.

Yesterday's routine parliament session, the first since Rajapakse and his disputed administration were deposed, began with the speaker

Rajapakse asks House to hold national election

Wickremesinghe's party rejects Rajapakse's call and demands vote

announcing that the country now had no government.

"As of now, there is no prime minister, no cabinet ministers and no government in Sri Lanka," said Karu Jayasuriya, wearing his black and gold robe. "I do not recognise anyone as prime minister."

The vote ousting Rajapakse and the Supreme Court's rulings were a major

boost to Wickremesinghe.

The four-time prime minister, popular with Western countries for his economic reforms, had refused to leave his official residence after being fired by the president.

Wickremesinghe's party was also staging a mass rally in the capital yesterday to demonstrate his public support. Hundreds of supporters were being bussed into Colombo for the rally, party officials said.

Addressing parliament yesterday as an ordinary member, Rajapakse asked the house to end the crisis by holding a national election.

"Let's go for an election. We want an election, ageneral election," Rajapakse said.

But Wickremesinghe's party immediately moved a resolution rejecting Rajapakse's call and demanded a vote that triggered angry protests from legislators loyal to Rajapakse and Sirisena.

Sirisena, who is vested with constitutional powers to induct a new prime minister and a cabinet of ministers, was yet to take note of Wednesday's no-confidence motion.

No place for 'empire and aggression' in Indo-Pacific

Pence tells Asean leaders in Singapore

REUTERS, Singapore

US Vice President Mike Pence yesterday told leaders of Southeast Asian nations that there was no place for "empire and aggression" in the Indo-Pacific region, a comment that could be interpreted as a reference to China's rise.

Pence did not mention China in his remarks at the opening of a summit with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in Singapore, but stressed that small countries as well as large ones should be allowed to prosper in the Indo-Pacific.

The prime minister of Singapore later said that Southeast Asian countries did not want to take sides when pulled in different directions by major powers, but that one day it may have to.

Leaders at the Asean meetings this week heard warnings that the post-World War Two international order was in jeopardy and trade tensions between Washington and Beijing could trigger a "domino effect" of protectionist measures by other countries.

"Like you, we seek an Indo-Pacific in which all nations, large and small, can prosper and thrive - secure in our sovereignty, confident in our values, and growing stronger together," Pence said. "We all agree that empire and aggression have no place in the Indo-Pacific."

He said Washington had taken action to promote this vision, including steps to spur private investment in infrastructure and a pursuit of trade that is "free, fair, and reciprocal".

The vice president highlighted the United States' "pressure campaign" on North Korea, its "commitment to uphold the freedom of the seas and skies" and determination to ensure that Southeast Asian nations are secure in their sovereign borders, on land, and at sea in the digital world.

Pence also told reporters Trump and Kim Jong Un will likely meet again after New Year, but insisted his government would not repeat past mistakes where "promises are broken."

US VP urges sanctions pressure on N Korea

Says Trump and Kim will likely meet again after New Year

US lawmakers launch legislation hitting China

Western envoys seek meeting on abuses in Xinjiang

AGENCIES

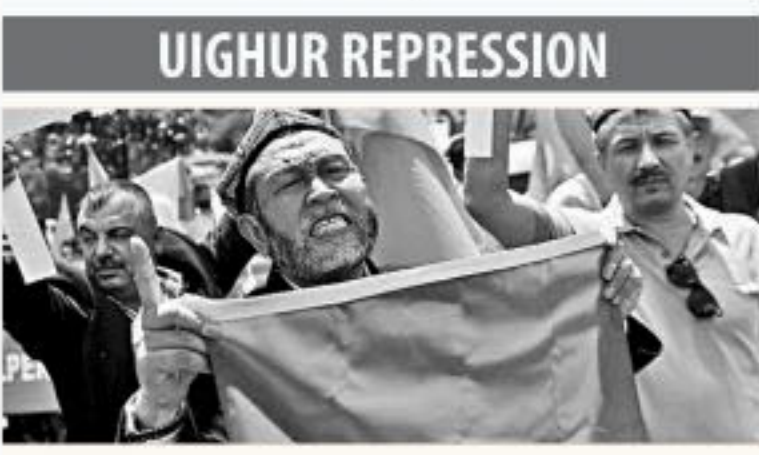
A bipartisan group of US lawmakers introduced legislation Wednesday seeking to punish China over its "human rights abuses" of the majority-Muslim Uighur population in the country's west, a move that drew immediate anger from Beijing.

Legislation introduced in both the Senate and House of Representatives seeks to toughen US President Donald Trump's administration's response to what the lawmakers say are gross violations of human rights in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

The bill urges US authorities to impose targeted sanctions on members of China's government, the ruling Communist Party and state security apparatus, as well

Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and other officials "credibly alleged to be responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere."

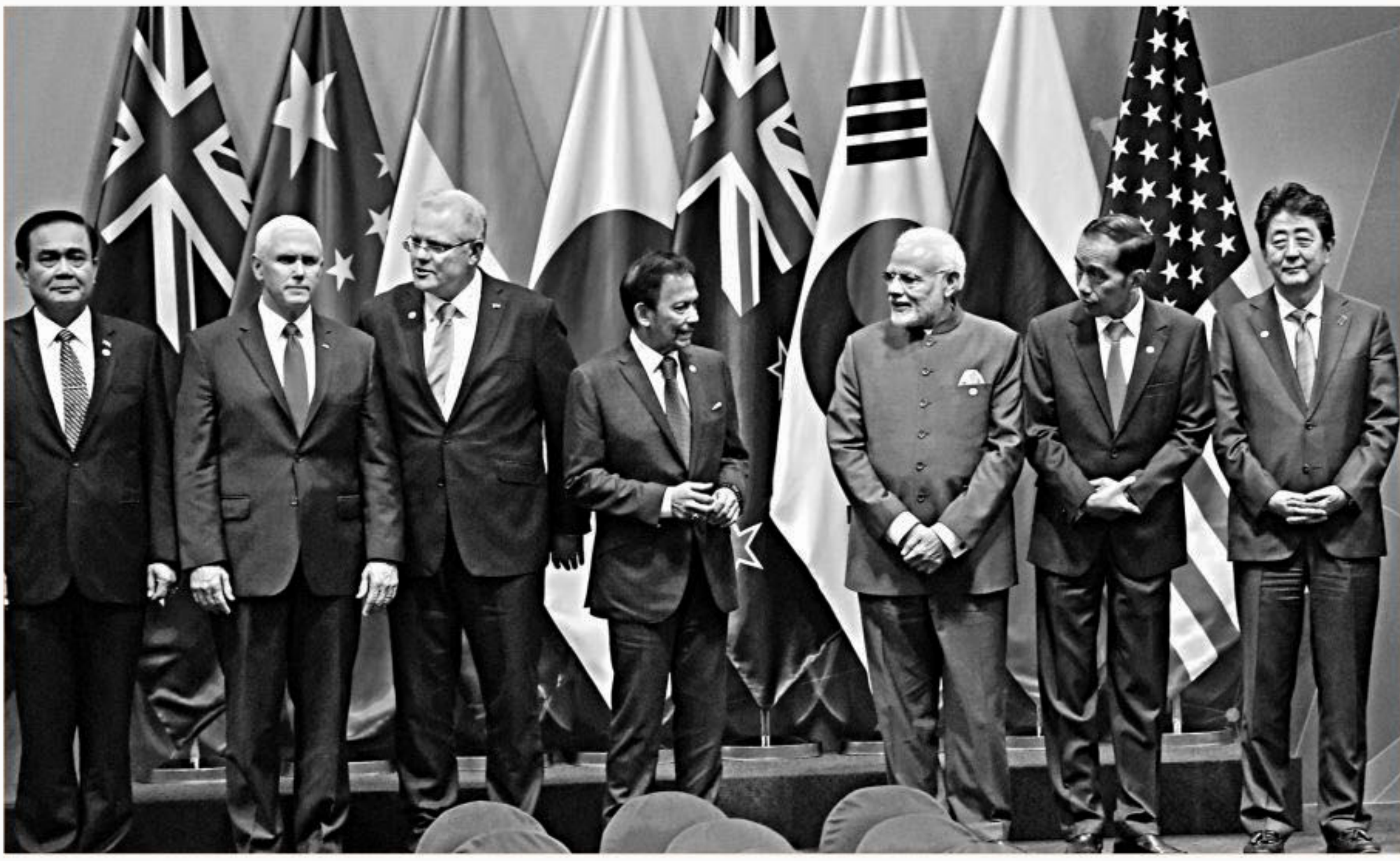
Washington must hold government and Communist Party officials "responsible for gross violations of human rights and possible



UIGHUR REPRESSION

crimes against humanity, including the internment in 'political re-education' camps of as many as a million Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim minorities," Senator Marco Rubio, a chief sponsor, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, a group of 15 Western ambassadors in Beijing, spearheaded by Canada, are seeking a meeting with the top official in China for an explanation of alleged rights abuses against ethnic Uighurs, reported Reuters.



Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha, US Vice President Mike Pence, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pose for a group photo before the start of a plenary session on the sidelines of Asean summit in Singapore yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

SUMMIT NO-SHOWS

Duterte defends need to 'power nap'

AFP, Singapore

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday made light of his penchant for daytime dozes after his office said "power naps" had caused the gruff leader to miss a number of key meetings at a Singapore summit.

Duterte is attending the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) meeting alongside a string of world leaders including Russia's Vladimir Putin, Japan's Shinzo Abe, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and US Vice-President Mike Pence.

But on Wednesday, the mercurial leader missed four of the eleven meetings he was slated to attend, as well as a gala dinner hosted by Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

"What's wrong with my nap?" the 73-year-old told



reporters as he arrived at the summit venue yesterday morning for another long day of meetings.

Asked if he felt fully rested he replied: "Still not good enough, but enough to sustain the endurance for the last days."

Duterte's no-shows on Wednesday prompted a statement from his office explaining he had only had three hours of sleep the night before.

"He took power naps to catch (up) on sleep," presidential spokesman Salvador S. Panelo said, adding that "some quarters are making a big fuss of the president skipping a few meetings".

Does not compute

Japan cyber security minister admits shunning PCs

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese minister in charge of cyber security has provoked astonishment by admitting he has never used a computer in his professional life, and appearing confused by the concept of a USB drive.

Yoshitaka Sakurada, 68, is the deputy chief of the government's cyber security strategy office and also the minister in charge of the Olympic and Paralympic Games that Tokyo will host in 2020.

In parliament on Wednesday however, he admitted he doesn't use computers.

"Since the age of 25, I have instructed my employees and secretaries, so I don't use computers myself," he said in a response to an opposition question in a lower house session, local media reported.

He also appeared confused by the question when asked about whether USB drives were in use at Japanese nuclear facilities.

His comments were met with incredulity by opposition lawmakers.

"It's unbelievable that someone who has not touched computers is responsible for cyber security policies," said opposition lawmaker Masato Imai.

Pakistan Christian woman in limbo after SC verdict

AFP, Islamabad

A week after being freed from jail, Asia Bibi - a Pakistani Christian woman on death row for eight years for blasphemy -- remains in limbo, with negotiations apparently under way to allow her to leave the country despite objections from Islamist hardliners demanding her execution.

Since the Supreme Court overturned Bibi's conviction last month, Pakistan has been rattled by violent protests from Islamists calling for her beheading, for mutiny in the armed forces and for the murder of the country's top judges.

Earlier this month, the government struck a deal with the demonstrators after days of street protests saw large swathes of the country paralysed.

But questions remain over Bibi's whereabouts, the court's decision, and how hardliners may react to further developments.

Rumours are rife in Pakistan that she has

already left the country, with fake reports claiming she met with Pope Francis in the Vatican. AFP has debunked the reports of Bibi meeting the pontiff.

The Pakistani government has repeatedly stated that Bibi is being held in a secure location in Pakistan after being released from a prison in central Multan last week, though her exact whereabouts are unknown.

She is not being allowed to leave the country as her case is subjected to a final review. The petition essentially checks to see if any procedural or clerical errors were made by the court during its final ruling.

If there were not, then the decision will stand. The chances of the apex court's acquittal being overturned are slim, according to Bibi's lawyer.

Earlier this week, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that his government was holding talks with Pakistan over potentially offering asylum to Bibi.

BLASPHEMY ROW



Monkey kills baby boy in Indian city

AFP, New Delhi

A baby died after a monkey snatched it from its mother's arms, Indian police investigating the incident in the city of Agra, home to the Taj Mahal, said yesterday.

The 12-day-old boy was being fed by his mother when a rhesus macaque monkey broke into the room late Monday, local deputy police chief Prashant Verma told AFP.

The monkey grabbed the infant and jumped away along several rooftops in a cramped district of the global tourist hotspot, he said.

Locals chased the monkey down after the mother raised the alarm, forcing the animal to abandon the baby's body on top of a building.

Verma said the infant was declared dead on arrival at hospital but the family refused to allow a postmortem and the cause of death -- whether from a fall, bite or something else -- could not be ascertained.

India has an estimated monkey population of 50 million and roughly 10,000 are believed to roam Agra, stealing goods, bothering residents and breaking into properties.

Incidents of attacks by macaques -- a species with reddish-pink faces common across India -- are frequent in the city.

Last week a girl was grievously injured in Agra in a ferocious attack by monkeys.