

Move on to unveil civilian ruling body

Say Sudan protest leaders; US to send envoy to encourage transition

Afp, Khartoum

Protest leaders yesterday announced plans to unveil a civilian body to take over from Sudan's ruling military council as crowds of demonstrators kept up the pressure outside army headquarters and Washington said it will send an envoy to encourage the transition.

The military council, which took power after ousting Sudan's longtime leader Omar al-Bashir on April 11, has so far resisted calls from protesters to quickly make way for a civilian administration.

The Sudanese Professionals Association, which has been spearheading the protests, said in a statement that the civilian council members would be named at a news conference at 1700 GMT on Sunday outside the army complex to which foreign diplomats are also invited.

"We are demanding that this civilian council, which will have representatives of the army, replace the military council," Ahmed al-Rabia, a leader of the umbrella group of unions for doctors, engineers and teachers, told AFP.

Four months after anti-regime protests started, access roads were packed yesterday with crowds flocking to huge square outside army headquarters.

Activists mobilised demonstrators through social media to keep up the pressure for replacing the military council, now led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

"Power to civilians, power to civilians," protesters chanted through Thursday night.

"I won't leave until Burhan transfers power to a civilian government," said Wali Aldeen, who has camped outside the complex since the day Bashir was ousted. Activists have called for large crowds to gather after weekly Muslim prayers, as on previous Fridays. Protests first broke out on December 19 in response to the tripling of bread prices, swiftly turning into nationwide rallies against Bashir's three-decade rule.



British actress Emma Thompson gives an address from the stage atop the pink boat to climate change activists occupying the road junction at Oxford Circus in central London yesterday during the fifth day of an environmental protest by the Extinction Rebellion group. *Inset*, climate change activists block the entrance of the Societe Generale bank headquarters in La Defense, near Paris, during the environmental protest called by the group.

PHOTO: AFP



Police: Short-circuit likely caused Notre Dame fire

A French judicial police official said investigators think an electrical short-circuit most likely caused Notre Dame Cathedral fire. The official, who spoke anonymously about the ongoing investigation, said investigators still don't have the green light to work in the cathedral and search in the rubble for safety reasons. He told The Associated Press the monument is still being consolidated with wooden planks to support some fragile parts of the walls. The remaining paintings inside the cathedral in Paris were set to be removed yesterday and stored, with fire service officials now satisfied the damaged structure is safe enough to go inside.

China invites N Korea to Belt and Road summit

China said yesterday leaders from 37 nations and North Korean representatives will attend a summit for its Belt and Road Initiative next week as it hit back at criticism of the massive trade infrastructure project. Chinese President Xi Jinping's pet project is a \$1 trillion programme that includes maritime, rail and road projects in Asia, Africa and Europe. The Belt and Road Initiative has divided Europe, and Washington has called it a "vanity project", but a growing number of nations are signing up despite warnings about debt and opaque deals that favour Chinese firms.



Pak PM appoints new FM in major reshuffle

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan made a sweeping cabinet reshuffle on Thursday night after only seven months in power and appointed Abdul Hafeez Shaikh as de facto finance minister to steer the country through worsening economic turmoil. Pakistan is on the brink of signing up for its 13th International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout since the late 1980s in a bid to stave off a balance of payments crisis and ease ballooning current account and fiscal deficits. Khan's government inherited a wobbly economy but the former cricketer has come under intense criticism for failing to fulfil his promises that he would steady the ship and bring prosperity to Pakistan. Khan late on Thursday announced 10 ministerial appointments in a shakeup that included the departure of Finance Minister Asad Umar, who has been a close ally to Khan for many years.

SOURCE: AP, REUTERS, CNBC

'It'll be my team' Pompeo says nothing's changed on N Korea denuclearization talks

Route Rs, Washington

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said US diplomatic efforts will continue toward the goal of denuclearization of North Korea, a day after a North Korean official said it no longer wanted to deal with him in talks.

"Nothing has changed. We'll continue to work to negotiate; still in charge of the team. President Trump's obviously in charge of the overall effort, but it'll be my team," Pompeo told reporters in Washington.

He added that US diplomats led by Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun would continue efforts to achieve North Korea's denuclearization, which the said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un committed to last June.

"I am convinced we will have a real opportunity to achieve that outcome," Pompeo said at a joint news conference after talks with Japan's foreign and defense ministers.

In answer to a question, Pompeo said he believed it was possible to maintain diplomatic engagement with North Korea even without providing the sanctions relief it had been demanding.

"We will continue to press North Korea to abandon all of its weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles related programs and facilities," Pompeo said. "We will continue to enforce all sanctions on North Korea and encourage every country to do so."

Off-duty journo shot dead

Police treat incident as terrorist attack; EU condemns

Route Rs, Belfast

An off-duty journalist was killed after shots were fired during rioting in the Northern Irish city of Londonderry overnight, an attack that shocked the province and police said was likely the work of nationalist militants.

Rioting erupted in the Irish nationalist Creggan area of the city late on Thursday following a raid by police, who said they were trying to prevent militant attacks over the weekend. At least 50 petrol bombs were thrown and two cars set on fire.

"Unfortunately at 11 o'clock last night a gunman appeared and fired a number of shots towards the police and a young woman, Lyra McKee, 29 years old, was wounded" and later died, Police Service of Northern Ireland Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hamilton told journalists yesterday.

McKee, a journalist whose work has been published in magazines and newspapers both in Northern Ireland and abroad, was writing a book on the disappearance of young people during the three decades of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, which ended with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement peace deal.

N IRELAND RIOT



The European Commission yesterday condemned the killing of McKee.

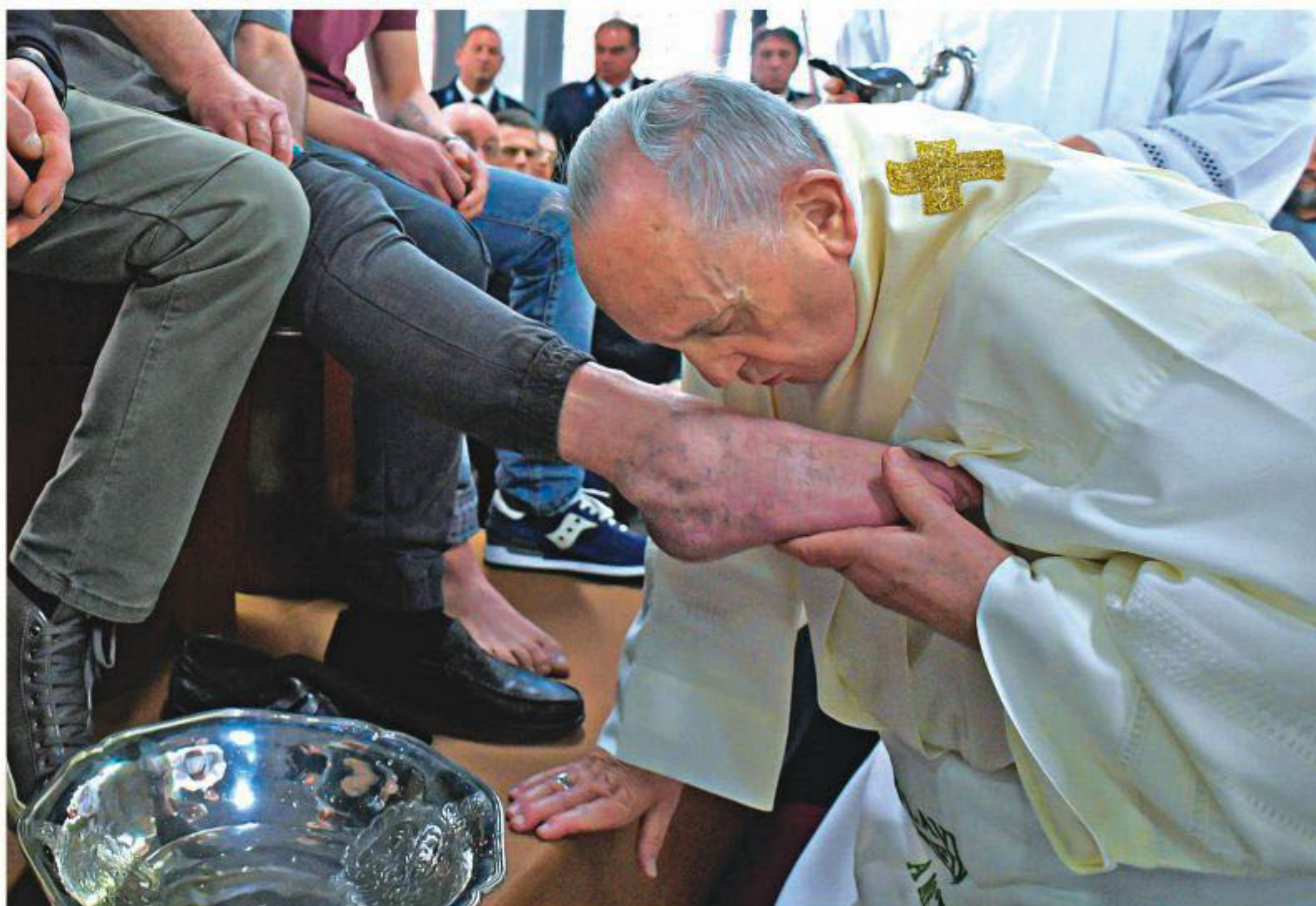
"The death of Lyra McKee in last night's suspected terrorist incident in Londonderry is shocking and truly senseless," British Prime Minister Theresa May said in a statement.

Described by her publisher Faber as a rising star of investigative journalism, McKee's death was condemned by both Irish nationalist and pro-British unionist politicians.

"We are all full of sadness after last night's events. We cannot allow those who want to propagate violence, fear and hate to drag us back to the past," Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said in a statement.

Police said they were treating the incident as a terrorist attack and had opened a murder inquiry. The New IRA group, which has been responsible for several attacks in recent years, was most likely behind the killing, Assistant Chief Constable Hamilton said.

Saoradh, a political party with links to dissident militants, said in a statement it understood McKee was standing close to police and was killed accidentally by a "Republican Volunteer."



Pope Francis kisses a foot of an inmate during the celebrations of the Holy Thursday at the District House of Velletri prison, in Velletri near Rome, Italy, on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Man amputates finger after vote mistake

Afp, New Delhi

An Indian man chopped off his index finger in desperation after voting for the wrong party in the country's national election.

In a video that has gone viral on social media, Pawan Kumar said he became confused by the symbols on the electronic voting machine and voted for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party instead of its regional rival in Uttar Pradesh state on Thursday.

Distraught, Kumar went home and chopped off his finger with a meat cleaver.

Even though votes are cast electronically at polling stations, the index finger of every voter is marked with indelible ink after they cast ballots, to make sure they do not vote again.

'Make comedy film on him' Urmila Matondkar attacks Modi, says he doesn't deserve biopic

Ndtv OMNe

Actor-turned-politician Urmila Matondkar took a savage dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he didn't deserve a biopic as he failed to deliver anything as the head of the government.

Matondkar, who is contesting the national election in Mumbai North as a Congress candidate, further said a comedy film should be made on the PM.

"The biopic made on his (PM Modi's) life is nothing but a joke as the prime minister, who claims to have a 56-inch-chest, has miserably failed to deliver anything. The movie made on his life is a joke on the democracy, poverty and diversity of India, which has been damaged," Matondkar was quoted as saying by news agency PTI on Thursday.

"Rather, a comedy film should be made on him and his unfulfilled promises," she added.

Actor Vivek Oberoi, a self-proclaimed fan of PM Modi, starred in

a film titled "PM Narendra Modi", which hit a roadblock as the Election Commission stayed its release until the national election was over, saying it may disturb the level playing field in polls.

Incidentally, Oberoi had made a

INDIAN POLLS



similar comment on the Congress president Rahul Gandhi in an interview to NDTV. "Why should I make a biopic on Rahul Gandhi? What has he done that is noteworthy," he had said. "I'd have to shoot most of the film in Thailand," he had further added.

Urmila Matondkar, a popular actor,

joined the Congress last month. She would take on the BJP candidate Gopal Shetty, who is also the sitting parliamentarian from the constituency.

"What can be worse than a prime minister of a democratic country not holding even a single press conference in the last five years," she added.

Maharashtra will go to polls in the first four phases, beginning April 11. Results of the polls will be declared on May 23.

Meanwhile, India's Election Commission (EC) has sought a report from the West Bengal chief electoral officer on a Bangla feature film stated to be a "biopic on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee".

The directive came after BJP and Communist Party of India (Marxist) sought a ban on commercial release of the film in the midst of the country's parliamentary elections.

The film titled "Baghini-Bengal Tigris" is slated to hit the cinema halls on May 3, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

'Move to Antarctica' Indonesian presidential challenger tells pollsters

Afp, Jakarta

Indonesia's presidential challenger yesterday slammed pollsters as untrustworthy and said they should move to Antarctica so they could "lie to the penguins", as he refused to concede defeat in this week's election.

Firebrand ex-general Prabowo Subianto has rejected a dozen so-called quick counts that say Indonesian president Joko Widodo was re-elected Wednesday by a comfortable margin.

The counts, which are samples conducted by pollsters, have been reliable indicators in past elections. Official results are not due until next month.

Subianto -- pilloried online for his refusal to concede -- ratcheted up the rhetoric yesterday, after claiming he was the Southeast Asian nation's new president.

"The people of Indonesia don't trust you," he thundered to around a thousand

supporters outside his home in the capital Jakarta.

"Maybe you can move to Antarctica. You can lie to the penguins."

Yesterday's crowd size was small for a city that has seen huge street protests in the past.

Subianto portrayed himself as a man of the people during the heated presidential campaign, despite his immense wealth and ties to Indonesia's corrupt Suharto dictatorship, which collapsed in 1998.

"This is a victory of the people. The Indonesian people have risen," he told the crowd.

"The Indonesian people don't want to be cheated anymore."

On Thursday evening, Widodo said that he had received phone calls from world leaders to congratulate him on the country's polls, but added that he would await final results before formally declaring victory.

India suspends cross-LoC trade with Pak

Afp, New Delhi

India has suspended trade across its disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan, alleging that weapons and drugs are being smuggled across the route, as tensions simmer between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Kashmir has been on edge since a February suicide attack that killed 40 Indian paramilitaries and brought the two countries to the brink of war with cross-border air strikes.

On Thursday, India's government, which is in the middle of a tough national election, said it had reports that trade on the border was being "misused by Pakistan-based elements for funnelling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency".

It also said many of those trading across the Line of Control, which divides Kashmir into zones under Indian and Pakistani control, had links to militant organisations.

The home ministry said trade would be suspended until a stricter inspection mechanism is in place.

The cross-border trade is based on a barter system, with traders exchanging goods including chillies, cumin, mango and dried fruit.

It began in 2008 as a way to improve strained relations between New Delhi and Islamabad, who have fought two of their three wars over the disputed region.

The Indian Express newspaper said yesterday that 35 trucks carrying fruit travelling from the Indian side of the border had been stopped after the government order.

Trade on the border has been suspended before, including in 2015, when India accused a Pakistani driver of drug trafficking.

NEWSIN brief

11 Cameroonians killed in Boko Haram attack

Afp, Yaounde

Boko Haram fighters torched a village in Cameroon's troubled Far North Region overnight and killed 11 civilians in their sleep, security sources told AFP yesterday. "Boko Haram made an incursion at night in the Tchakamari area. The toll is 11," a source close to security services in the area said, confirming a report from a member of a local self-defence militia.

Macron meets Kurds, vows French support

Afp, Paris

President Emmanuel Macron yesterday hosted representatives of the Kurdish-led force that defeated IS extremists in Syria, assuring them of France's support in the fight against remaining jihadists. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had in late March flushed out IS from their last bastion in Syria but still warn the jihadists remain a threat in places.

Turkey arrests two suspected UAE spies

Afp, Istanbul

Turkey has arrested two men suspected of spying for the United Arab Emirates and is probing if they are tied to Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder, Anadolu state news agency said yesterday. The two were detained as part of an investigation by Istanbul prosecutors into alleged spying by the Gulf state, Anadolu reported. It was not clear when they were arrested. A critic of the Saudi regime, Khashoggi was killed October 2 in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul by a team of 15 agents sent from Riyadh. His body has never been recovered.