

NEWSIN brief

Air strikes kill 9 in Syria's Idlib

AFP, Beirut

At least nine civilians, including two children, were killed Saturday in air strikes by Syria's government and its ally Russia in the northwest of the country, a war monitor said. Syria's military and Russia carried out more than 100 air raids in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo provinces, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in a statement.

Pope asks Bulgarians to be nice to migrants

AFP, Sofia

Pope Francis urged Bulgarians to open their hearts and doors to refugees as he began a visit to the European Union's poorest country, where the main Orthodox Church snubbed holding joint prayers with the pontiff. The three-day tour, which also takes him to North Macedonia, includes a visit to a refugee camp on the outskirts of Sofia and a commemoration of Mother Teresa, the most famous native of the Macedonian capital Skopje.

Venezuela military chopper crash kills 7

AFP, Caracas

Seven Venezuelan military officers were killed Saturday when their helicopter crashed outside Caracas, President Nicolas Maduro said. The chopper had left the Venezuelan capital in the morning headed for San Carlos in the country's northwest when it went down in a mountainous area of the El Hatillo municipality, the defense ministry said in a statement. They included two majors, three captains and two lieutenant colonels.



Palestinian mourners carry the shrouded body of Saba Abu Arar (14-month-old baby) during her funeral in Gaza City, yesterday; a Palestinian girl climbs on the remains of a building that was destroyed during an Israeli air strike on Rafah in the southern Gaza strip; and Israelis take cover as they hear sirens warning of incoming rockets from Gaza in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Let's do a deal' on Brexit

British PM tells Labour leader Corbyn

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday urged main opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to work with her to break the Brexit deadlock, telling him: "Let's do a deal".

May said she understood why hardcore Brexiters in her own centre-right Conservative Party, who want a clean break with the European Union, would wince at the prospect of striking a softer agreement with the veteran socialist.

But she insisted the clobbering both main parties took in last week's English local elections had increased the necessity of finding an EU divorce deal that a majority of MPs could get behind, even if many of her own backbenchers were not among them.

"To the leader of the opposition, I say this: let's listen to what the voters said in the elections and put our differences aside for a moment. Let's do a deal," she wrote in The Mail on Sunday newspaper.

May negotiated a withdrawal agreement with Brussels last year but MPs repeatedly voted it down, with large numbers of her own Conservative backbenchers standing against it.

"Regrettably, I have to accept there is no sign of that position changing," May wrote.

Had a withdrawal agreement been signed off, Britain

would have left the EU on March 29. Its exit date has twice been postponed and is now set at October 31.

"The government has been in talks with the opposition to try to find a unified, cross-party position," May said.

"Many of my colleagues find this decision uncomfortable. Frankly, it is not what I wanted, either.

"But we have to find a way to break the deadlock -- and I believe the results of the local elections give fresh urgency to this. We will keep negotiating, and keep trying to find a way through.

The Conservatives lost more than a thousand seats in Thursday's English local authority polls, but left-wing Labour failed to capitalise, also losing seats as voters vented their frustration at the Brexit impasse dominating British politics.

The Sunday Times newspaper claimed that the government was prepared to give way to Labour on three areas: customs, goods alignment and workers' rights.

The broadsheet said May would set out plans for a temporary customs arrangement with the EU that would last until the next general election, which must be held by May 2022. However, more than 100 opposition lawmakers have written to May and Corbyn to say they would vote against any agreement the pair reach unless it is subject to a referendum.



Erdogan condemns 'Israeli terrorism, atrocities in Gaza'

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday fiercely denounced Israel for the bombing of a building housing Turkey's state news agency Anadolu in Gaza.

"We strongly condemn Israel's attack against Anadolu Agency's office in Gaza," Erdogan said on Twitter.

"Turkey and Anadolu Agency will continue to tell the world about Israeli terrorism and atrocities in Gaza and other parts of Palestine despite such attacks," he wrote.

Anadolu reported that the building collapsed after being hit.

Staff were evacuated shortly before the strike which was preceded by a warning shot, the agency said, adding that none of its journalists had been hurt.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu added: "Targeting of @AnadoluAgency #Gaza office is new example of Israel's unrestrained aggression.

"Israeli violence against innocent people w/out distinction is a crime against humanity. Those who encourage Israel are also guilty. Will keep defending

#Palestinian cause, even if alone," he said.

Gaza militants on Saturday fired some 200 rockets at Israel, which responded with strikes that killed four Palestinians including a baby and her pregnant mother, according to officials, as a fragile ceasefire faltered and a further escalation was feared.

The latest flare-up came with Hamas, the Islamist movement that rules the blockaded Gaza Strip, seeking further concessions from Israel under the ceasefire.

The destruction of the Anadolu offices risks a new surge of tension between Turkey and Israel.

Turkey has repeatedly criticised Israeli policies even though the two countries in 2016 ended a six-year rift triggered by the Israeli storming of a Gaza-bound ship that left 10 Turkish activists dead.

Erdogan, an ardent defender of the Palestinian cause, and Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu frequently exchange barbs, notably during election campaigns.

Last month, Erdogan called the Israeli leader a "tyrant" after Netanyahu called him a "dictator" and a "joke".



Pak PM Imran Khan pays tribute to Tipu Sultan

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has paid tribute to Tipu Sultan, praising the 18th century ruler of Mysore for preferring to die for freedom rather than "live a life of enslavement". Imran Khan took to Twitter to express his admiration for the 18th century ruler of the erstwhile Mysore Kingdom also known as the Tiger of Mysore. It is not the first time Khan has praised Tipu Sultan's valour. In February, the Pakistan prime minister at a joint sitting of the Parliament convened in the wake of the heightened India-Pakistan tensions following the Pulwama terror attack lauded Tipu Sultan's gallantry. Tipu Sultan's death anniversary was on May 4.

UN biodiversity meet wraps up, report today

Diplomats and scientists from 132 nations wrapped up six days of negotiations in Paris Saturday over the wording of a landmark report on the dire state of Nature and its impact on humanity, a UN official told AFP. The bombshell executive summary of a 1,800-page tome crafted by more than 400 experts -- the first UN global assessment of the natural world in 15 years -- will be unveiled today. The report is likely to reveal that up to one million of Earth's estimated eight million species face extinction, many within decades. Many scientists have concluded that the planet has already entered a period of so-called "mass extinction," the first since the demise of non-avian dinosaurs 66 million years ago, and only the sixth in half-a-billion years.



N Korea tested 'tactical guided weapons'

North Korea's state media yesterday said that leader Kim Jong Un had overseen a rocket and tactical guided weapons test, after the drill Saturday raised concerns Pyongyang was escalating provocations with US nuclear negotiations deadlocked. A return to missile launches would be likely to infuriate US President Donald Trump, but the North's official KCNA news agency shied away from the term in its report, saying Kim had ordered a "strike drill" involving "long-range multiple rocket launchers" -- which are not targeted by UN sanctions resolutions -- and unspecified "tactical guided weapons".

SOURCE: AFP, IANS



Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn is carried in a golden palanquin during the coronation procession, as Princess Bajrakitiyabha Mahidol (bottom L) and Queen Suthida (bottom R) walk alongside, in Bangkok, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Be ready for US military action

Says Maduro as he rallies military

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro urged his troops Saturday to be "ready" for potential US military action, as a limited number of opposition supporters marched on military barracks in a bid to win the armed forces' support.

The small turnout for the Saturday marches -- with participants in the hundreds, not the thousands -- is another setback for opposition leader Juan Guaido, following a failed military uprising earlier in the week.

Maduro on Saturday instructed the military "to be ready to defend the homeland with weapons in your hands if one day the US empire dares to touch this territory, this sacred earth."

Underscoring the continued military support for his socialist regime, Maduro delivered his televised address from a base in northwestern Cujedales state -- where he appeared alongside his defense minister, Vladimir Padrino, and in the presence of more than 5,000 troops.

The United States has refused to take the threat of military action off the table in its push to oust Maduro -- although it so far has limited its campaign to ramping up sanctions.

Guaido's cause gained renewed support on Saturday from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who issued a video address to the Venezuelan people, telling them: "The time for transition is now."

Modi's 5 yrs 'most traumatic'

Manmohan blasts PM, says people should show him the exit door

PTI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should be shown exit door as his five-year rule has been "most traumatic and devastating" for India's youths, farmers, traders and every democratic institution, his predecessor Manmohan Singh said yesterday.

Singh, in an exclusive interview to PTI, dismissed the notion that there was a wave in favour of Modi and asserted that the people have made up their minds to vote out the government that "does not believe in inclusive growth and is only worried about its political existence at the altar of disharmony".

In one of his most fierce attacks on the Modi dispensation, Singh alleged that the past five years only witnessed "stench" of corruption peaking to "unimaginable proportions", adding demonetisation was perhaps the "biggest scam" of independent India.

The former prime minister also called Modi's Pakistan policy "slipshod", which he said was marred by a series of "flip-flops" -- from going to

Pakistan uninvited to inviting "rogue" ISI to the Pathankot air base in connection with the probe into a terrorist attack.

Singh, known as the architect of India's economic reforms in 1990s, felt the country is headed for a slowdown and accused the Modi regime of leaving the country's economy in "dire straits".

"A lie spoken a hundred times does not become the truth," he said on Modi's plank of nationalism, adding that terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir alone have gone up by 176 per cent and ceasefire violations at the border with Pakistan up 1,000 per cent in the past five years. He said that division and hate have become synonymous with the BJP and it thrives on societal fissures.

MAMATA DID NOT RETURN PM'S CALL
Meanwhile, a top government official yesterday revealed that Indian prime minister had on Saturday tried to contact West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to discuss cyclone Fani but could not do so as his calls were not returned. The prime minister then spoke to state governor Keshari Nath Tripathi, the official said.



2016 US ELECTION DEFEAT TO TRUMP

Obama 'blamed' Hillary

CNN ONLINE

Former President Barack Obama was stung and brooding in the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's loss to President Donald Trump, according to new sections of a book released next week, and partly blamed his former secretary of state for the loss.

In new chapters of "Obama: The Call of History," New York Times correspondent Peter Baker depicts the former president questioning his legacy and personally insulted that voters elected Trump instead of Clinton, whom he campaigned for heavily in the closing days of the 2016 contest.

"This stings," Obama told staffers during an Oval Office meeting in the weeks after the election, a source told David Remnick of The New Yorker. "This hurts."

Baker describes Obama as deeply skeptical of Trump and mystified at why voters chose him over the more experienced Clinton. And he writes that Obama and some of his aides faulted Clinton and her campaign decisions for the outcome, which shocked the then-president.

"To Obama and his team, however, the real blame lay squarely with Clinton," Baker writes in the book.

"She was the one who could not translate his strong record and healthy economy into a winning message. Never mind that Trump essentially ran the same playbook against Clinton that Obama did eight years earlier, portraying her as a corrupt exemplar of the status quo. She brought many of her troubles on herself."

Obama, who helped steer his vice president Joe Biden away from a 2016 bid, believed Clinton's victory was all but assured.

"Obama woke up on Election Day convinced, like most of the country, that he would not be handing the nuclear football over to Donald Trump," Baker writes. "The reality television star, he thought, was a joke. No way Americans would turn to him."

On election night, Obama was watching a movie in the White House theater when troubling signs began emerging.

"Huh," he said, according to former first lady Michelle Obama's memoir. "Results in Florida are looking kind of strange."