

NEWS IN brief

Trump, Xi may meet next month on trade
AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump and China's Xi Jinping could meet next month on the sidelines of the G20 summit to hash out their differences on trade, but no new talks are scheduled, White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow said yesterday. The world's top two economies ended two days of negotiations in Washington on Friday with no deal. The G20 summit is scheduled to take place in Osaka on June 28-29.

8 'terrorist' suspects killed in Saudi Arabia
AFP, Riyadh

Eight members of a "terrorist" cell were killed on Saturday in a police raid in Saudi Arabia's eastern Qatif region, a Shia minority stronghold, state media reported. The recently-formed cell was preparing to carry out "terrorist" activities against the security of the country, the official Saudi Press Agency reported citing a state security spokesman. He said the men were killed after they fired shots at security forces, who had surrounded a residential apartment in the Sanabis neighbourhood.

Rebel fire kills 4 kids in Syria regime town
AFP, Damascus

Rebel rocket fire killed four children and a woman yesterday in a regime-held town outside the embattled jihadist bastion of Idlib in northwest Syria, state news agency SANA said. The bombardment by "terrorist groups" on the Christian-majority town of Suqaylabiyah in Hama province also wounded six other children, SANA said, using its term for rebels and jihadists. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the rockets had been fired from the nearby Idlib region, which is controlled by former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.



Activists take part in an Extinction Rebellion climate change march on International Mothers' Day in London, Britain, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

A bid to 'sabotage prosperity' of Pak Says PM after gunmen storm luxury hotel; death toll rises to 5

AFP, Islamabad

An attack on a luxury hotel in the southwestern city of Gwadar was a bid to "sabotage prosperity", Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan said yesterday, as police confirmed all the attackers had been killed.

At least five persons were shot dead Saturday after gunmen stormed a luxury hotel in the southwestern Pakistani city of Gwadar, the centrepiece of a multi-billion dollar Chinese infrastructure project.

During the attack "5 individuals got Shaheed (martyred), including 4 hotel employees and a Pakistan Navy soldier," the military said in a statement. One of the hotel staff killed was a security guard shot at the entrance.

A Baloch separatist group, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), claimed responsibility for the attack via Twitter. "Such attempts especially in Balochistan are an effort to sabotage our economic projects and prosperity. We shall not allow these agendas to succeed," Khan said in a statement issued by his office.

The Chinese embassy in Islamabad also strongly condemned the incident.

Local police said four gunmen who had stormed the hotel, shooting dead a security guard, had been killed overnight by security forces.

"All four terrorists were killed and security forces had taken complete control of the hotel building," a local police official in Gwadar told AFP via telephone.

Mohammad Aslam, a police official in Gwadar, told AFP Saturday that only staff were present in the building at the time of the attack.

Climate goal 'not on track'

Guterres as UN kicks off major climate change effort

AFP, Wellington

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has kicked off a major United Nations push for progress on what he calls the defining issue of our time: climate change.

Guterres travelled to New Zealand yesterday, from where he is set to visit several Pacific islands where rising sea levels are threatening the very existence of those small countries.

The stepped-up diplomacy will culminate with a climate action summit at the UN in September, an event billed as a last chance to prevent irreversible climate change, three years after the Paris agreement went into force.

"We are seeing everywhere a clear demonstration that we are not on track to achieve the objectives defined in the Paris agreement," Guterres said on the failure to limit rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial revolution levels.

In a strong message for action on climate change, Guterres said international political resolve was fading and it was the small island nations that were "really in the front

line" and would suffer most.

In Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, Guterres will meet with families whose lives have been upended by cyclones, flooding and other extreme weather events.

Pacific island countries face an especially dire risk from climate change because of sea level rise. In some cases, low-lying countries could



disappear completely.

Fiji is working to build a coalition of more than 90 countries from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia facing climate crisis.

But the UN push on climate change is shaping up amid geopolitical shifts: the United States under Donald Trump has decided to pull out of the Paris agreement

to combat global warming, giving China more space to assert its views.

A string of apocalyptic reports on the state of the planet is bringing home the need for concrete steps. One million species are on the brink of extinction. Carbon dioxide emissions continue to rise, pushing targets from the Paris accord further out of reach.

Guterres has told leaders to bring plans, not speeches, to the summit to be held in New York on September 23 during the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations.

UN climate envoy Luis Alfonso de Alba told AFP on Friday that he was optimistic about prospects for a breakthrough on climate, saying the dire predictions were having a galvanizing effect.

"The situation worldwide is quite different from what it was five to 10 years ago. Five to 10 years ago, countries were looking at their neighbours before acting," he said.

"Today, everybody has full conscience of the urgency to act, and they are not going to wait for their neighbours to act."

If they make a move we will hit them in the head

Warns Iran's Guards as Rouhani warns of greater hardship

REUTERS, Geneva

The United States' military presence in the Gulf used to be a serious threat but now it is an opportunity, a senior commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday, as President Hassan Rouhani warned of greater hardship following biting US sanctions.

The US military has sent forces, including an aircraft carrier, Patriot missile system and B-52 bombers, to the Middle East to counter what US officials have said are "clear indications" of threats from Iran to its forces there.

"An aircraft carrier that has at least 40 to 50 planes on it and 6,000 forces gathered within it was a serious threat for us in the past but now...the threats have switched to opportunities," Amiral Hajizadeh, head of the Guards' aerospace division said.

He added, "If (the Americans) make a move we will hit them in the head."

The commander of the Guards, Major General Hossein Salami, said in a parliament session yesterday that the United States has started a psychological war in the region, according to a parliamentary spokesman.

On Saturday, Rouhani called for unity among Iran's political factions to overcome conditions which he said may be harder than those during the 1980s war with Iraq, state media reported, as the country faces tightening US sanctions.

"Today, it cannot be said whether conditions are better or worse than the (1980-88) war period, but during the war we did not have a problem with our banks, oil sales or imports and exports, and there were only sanctions on arms purchases," Rouhani said, according to the state news agency IRNA.

"The pressures by enemies is a war unprecedented in the history of our Islamic revolution... but I do not despair and have great hope for the future and believe that we can move past these difficult conditions provided that we are united," Rouhani told activists from various factions.

Meanwhile, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz yesterday warned of possible direct or proxy Iranian attacks on Israel should the stand-off between Tehran and Washington escalate.



Gaza crossings reopened

Israel yesterday reopened its crossings with the blockaded Gaza Strip after closing them during a deadly escalation earlier this month, an official said, as a fragile truce held. Both the Erez crossing for people and Kerem Shalom crossing for goods were open and operating, a spokeswoman for COGAT, the defence ministry unit that oversees the crossings, said in a statement. Both had been closed on May 4, when Gaza rulers Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad fired hundreds of rockets at Israel, with the army striking dozens of targets in Gaza in response. Four Israeli civilians and 25 Palestinians, including at least nine militants, were killed in the two-day flare-up, which ended on Monday in a tentative truce. Palestinian officials said Israel had agreed to ease its crippling decade-long blockade of the impoverished enclave in exchange for calm. Israel did not publicly confirm the deal, but on Friday lifted the ban it had imposed on Palestinian fishing boats operating off Gaza.

May to clarify resignation timetable soon: senior MP

British Prime Minister Theresa May is expected to set out her departure plans within days, the leader of backbench lawmakers in her governing Conservative Party said Saturday. Graham Brady, who chairs the 1922 Committee of rank-and-file Conservative MPs, said he expected May to provide clarity on her exit timetable at a meeting with him on Wednesday. May has said she will step aside once a Brexit deal has been passed by parliament. But the clamour for her to go sooner increased after the May 2 English local elections. The Conservatives lost control of several local authorities and well over a thousand seats, performing far worse than even the gloomiest predictions as voters vented their frustration over the Brexit impasse. May has agreed to meet Brady on Wednesday over her resignation plans.



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, a leader of India's main opposition Congress party, is hugged by an elderly woman after she casted her vote at a polling station in New Delhi, India, yesterday, Inset: Rahul Gandhi, president of India's Congress party, shows his ink-marked finger after casting his vote at a polling station in New Delhi.

POLITICAL STALEMATE IN VENEZUELA

Guaido seeks US's help to solve crisis

REUTERS, Caracas

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido said on Saturday he has asked his envoy to the United States to meet with Pentagon officials to "cooperate" on a solution to the South American country's political crisis.

Guaido, the leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, added he had received word from China that the country would join a diplomatic effort between European and Latin American countries, known as the International Contact Group on Venezuela, to negotiate an end to the crisis.

In January, Guaido invoked the OPEC nation's constitution to assume an interim presidency, arguing President Nicolas Maduro's 2018 re-election was illegitimate. He has been recognized by most Western and Latin American countries, but Maduro has retained the support of allies China, Russia and Cuba.

Guaido's effort to oust Maduro so he can take power and call new elections has stalled in recent weeks, after an attempted military uprising on April 30 was put down. Guaido told an Italian newspaper this week that he would "probably" accept a US military intervention if the United States proposed it.

"We have instructed our ambassador Carlos Vecchio to meet immediately ... with the Southern Command and its admiral to establish a direct relationship," Guaido said at a rally in Caracas on Saturday. "We have said from the beginning that we will use all the resources at our disposal to build pressure."

Rift appears in opposition

Mamata, Mayawati, Akhilesh may skip post-election meet in Delhi

NDTV ONLINE

At least three key opposition leaders - Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati and her ally Samajwadi leader Akhilesh Yadav - are likely to skip the post-election opposition meet in Delhi that will be hosted by the Congress.

Sources said Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who had gone to Bengal last week and met Mamata Banerjee, received a negative when they discussed the meet. There is no need for any meeting before the results come out on May 23, she told Naidu, sources said. Negative responses have also come from Mayawati.

The reason, sources indicate, is the inevitable question of the prime minister's post in case of a favourable result for the opposition. While all opposition leaders have so far carefully avoided questions on the top job for the sake of unity, both Mayawati and Mamata Banerjee harbor prime ministerial ambition. Congress chief Rahul Gandhi's name has already been proposed for the post by several leaders, including DMK chief MK Stalin.

Both have been avoiding close association with the Congress, staying out of an alliance with the Congress in their states, even if they are allies at the national level.

Mayawati has made no secret of her disdain of the Congress. Not only has she left the party out of the Uttar Pradesh alliance, over the last five months, she has repeatedly threatened to pull the rug from the Kamal Nath government, which has a wafer-thin majority in Madhya Pradesh.

Mamata Banerjee, a veteran of more than 30 years in politics, has not spoken openly of her ambition for the top job. Banerjee has also kept alive her links with Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, who is battling for a non-Congress, non-BJP front to rule at the Centre, with a prime minister from a southern state.

After a heated campaign, Rahul Gandhi has toned down her rhetoric against the Bengal leader, who, after one of his scathing attacks, had dismissed him as a "young lad".



Lanka town under curfew after anti-Muslim attacks

Catholics hold first Sunday mass after Easter bombings

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops in a northern town fired shots into the air and police imposed a curfew yesterday after mobs attacked a mosque, in renewed religion tensions in the wake of the Easter terror attacks.

Police spokesman RuwanGunasekera said that the mobs in Chilaw, 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of the capital Colombo, also attacked Muslim-owned businesses.

The violence erupted in Chilaw, a Catholic-majority town, after a resident misunderstood a Facebook post as a threat against Christians.

Gunasekera said the Muslim man who posted the comment has been arrested. He said the curfew would be lifted at dawn today.

The latest unrest came as Catholic churches resumed their public Sunday masses for the first time after the April 21 bombings at three churches and three luxury hotels left 258 people dead.

The attacks were blamed on a local group which had pledged an oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State group.

Last week, there were similar tensions at a town between Colombo and Chilaw where an argument between two men degenerated into religious violence leaving three people wounded.

Official sources said the curfew was imposed in Chilaw to prevent the unrest spreading to other areas.

Muslims make up around 10 percent of Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka's 21 million population and Christians about 7.6 percent.

Sri Lanka has been under a state of emergency since the suicide bombings. Security forces and police have been given sweeping powers to arrest and detain suspects for long periods.

Sri Lanka's police say they have either killed or arrested all those responsible for the bombings but that the threat of global terrorism persists.



Gunmen kill female ex-Afghan journalist in Kabul

Gunmen shot dead a former television journalist and adviser to the Afghan parliament in Kabul on Saturday, underlining threats to women and drawing widespread condemnation. Mina Mangal, who used to report for prominent TV station Ariana News, was killed by two unidentified men on a motorbike close to her home in eastern Kabul, police spokesman Basir Mujahid said. She had been on her way to work as an adviser to the parliament's cultural affairs commission. There was no immediate word on the motive for the attack. The killing came during heightened focus on women's rights ahead of a possible exit of foreign forces from Afghanistan and potential return of the hardline Taliban to a role in government. Afghanistan ranks near the bottom of global indices on gender equality, with forced marriages, honour killings and domestic violence prevalent nationwide, particularly in rural areas.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS