

Yemen rebels 'fire missile at Makkah'

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi-owned media yesterday accused Yemeni rebels of targeting Islam's holiest city Makkah after Riyadh and its allies said they had intercepted two missiles over the kingdom. Huthi rebels denied any such attack. Coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Maliki said two missiles were shot down between Jeddah and Taiz districts of Makkah province on Monday.

Separatist rebels kill 11 in India ambush

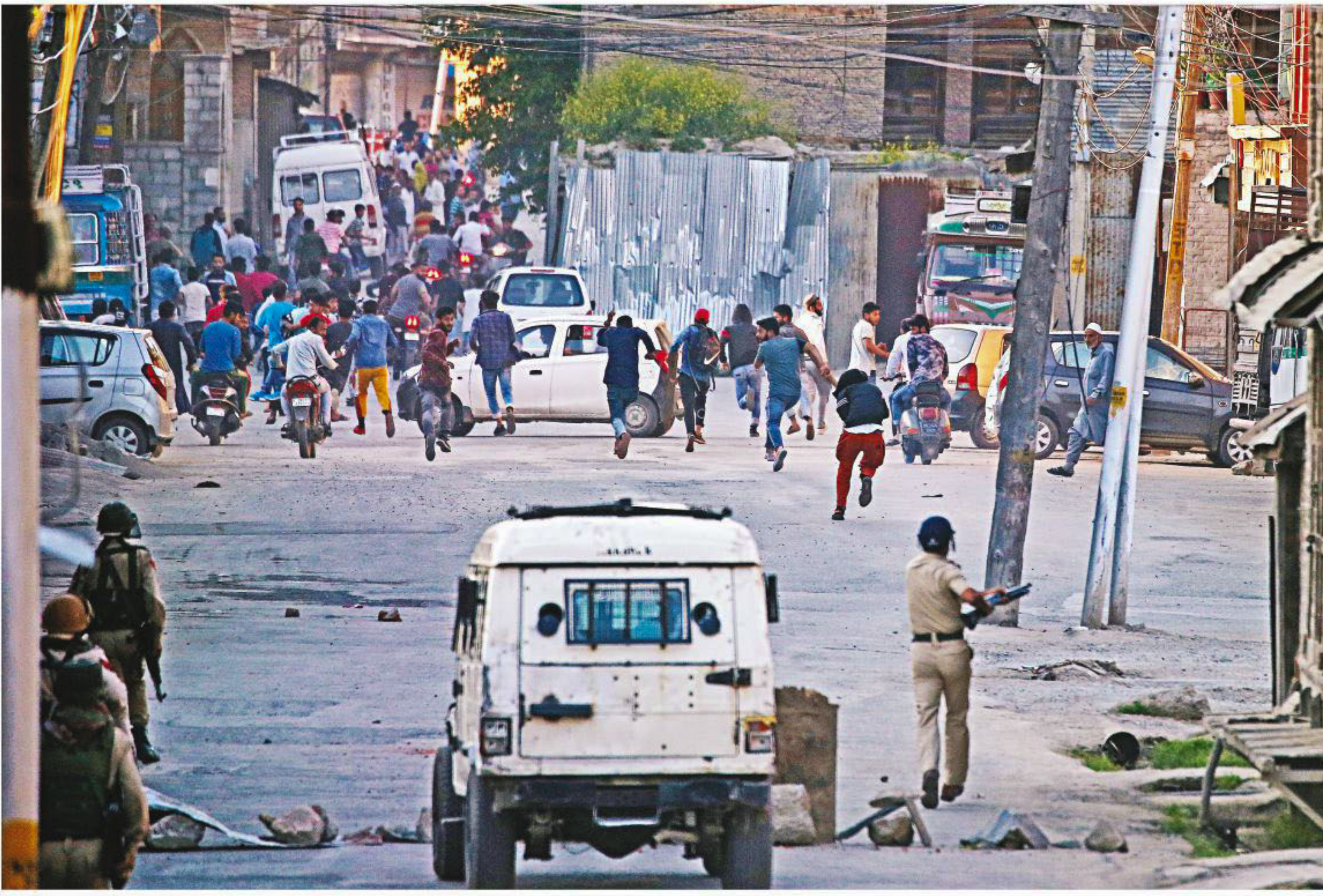
REUTERS, Guwahati

Eleven people, including a lawmaker and four of his family, were killed in an ambush by tribal separatists in the eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, a senior police official said yesterday. Heavily armed militants fired automatic weapons at the five-vehicle convoy of Tirong Aboh, a member of the legislative assembly for the state seat of Khonsa, in the Tirap district near the border with Myanmar, the police official said. No rebel group claimed responsibility of the attack.

Sudan protesters plan strike as talks falter

AFP, Khartoum

Sudanese protest leaders yesterday called on their supporters to prepare for a general strike after talks with the country's military rulers stalled on who will lead an agreed three-year transition. Early yesterday, the generals who overthrew veteran president Omar al-Bashir last month balked at protesters' demands for a civilian head and a civilian majority for an agreed new sovereign council to lead the transition.



Indian policemen chase protesters during clashes after separatists called for shutdown to mark the death anniversaries of chief cleric of Kashmir, Moulana Mohammad Farooq and Abdul Gani Lone, a Kashmiri separatist leader, in Srinagar, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ignore exit polls, be vigilant

Priyanka urges workers as Modi receives victory garlands from allies

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's main opposition Congress party has told its workers not to lose heart and to remain vigilant at vote-count centres after exit polls predicted a clear election victory for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The counting of votes cast in the seven-phase general election will take place tomorrow, with the result expected later that day.

Modi's ruling coalition is projected to win between 339 and 365 seats in the 545-member lower house of parliament with a Congress-led opposition alliance getting only 77 to 108, an exit poll from India Today Axis showed on Sunday.

The ruling alliance, led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), seems assured of victory.

Modi met leaders from his ruling alliance yesterday, receiving garlands and shawls from them in a show of optimism. Flanked by BJP president Amit Shah, Modi met cabinet ministers, party colleagues and dozens of the leaders from regional blocs that

are part of the alliance.

But exit polls in India have proved misleading before and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the younger sister of party president Rahul Gandhi, urged party



workers to ignore them, and to keep the faith.

"Don't let rumours and exit polls discourage you. This is being spread to break your determination," she said in an audio message late on Monday.

"This has further raised the need for you to remain alert. Please keep vigil outside strongrooms and counting centres. We are confident that our combined efforts will bear fruit,"

she said, referring to centres where electronic voting machines are kept.

The staggered general election, billed as the world's biggest democratic exercise with some 900 million eligible voters, began on April 11 and finished on Sunday.

The BJP says it is confident the final results will reflect the exit polls.

The BJP has also urged Congress to think about whether the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty still enjoys the support of the people.

The family has dominated politics since the British colonial rulers left in 1947, with three prime ministers.

But Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, a senior BJP member who would likely retain his role in a new Modi cabinet, said Congress could no longer rely on the family to win votes.

"Leaders are judged on merit and not on caste or family names," Jaitley said in a Facebook post.

If the BJP wins another majority on its own as expected, it would be the first time a party has won back-to-back majorities in parliament since 1984.

US lawmakers clash on Iran intelligence before briefing

UN expresses concern; Rouhani rejects talks

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers clashed Monday over intelligence on Iran, with an ally of President Donald Trump accusing Tehran of provocations that could draw a military response, ahead of a classified briefing on the tensions.

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan and General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, were set to head to the US Capitol yesterday to apprise lawmakers from both chambers on the latest developments, an administration official said.

Senior officials already briefed a key group of eight lawmakers on Thursday. Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican who has closely aligned himself with Trump, said he received his own briefing Monday from National Security Advisor John Bolton, a longtime hawk who called for an attack on Iran before taking his White House job.

"It is clear that over the last several weeks Iran has attacked pipelines and

ships of other nations and created threat streams against American interests in Iraq," Graham tweeted.

"If the Iranian threats against American personnel and interests are activated we must deliver an overwhelming military response."

A Democratic lawmaker, Representative Ruben Gallego of Arizona, quickly challenged Graham and said he had seen the same intelligence.

"That is not what is being said. This is total information bias to draw the conclusion he wants for himself and the media," Gallego tweeted.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani rejected any talks with the United States and yesterday called on the government to be given more power to run the sanctions-hit economy in an "economic war".

United Nations voiced concern on Monday about increasingly bellicose rhetoric between the United States and Iran and called on them to dial down their remarks.

May offers new deal to try to break Brexit deadlock

AGENCIES

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday set out a "new deal" for Britain's departure from the European Union, her fourth attempt to break an impasse in parliament over Brexit that has plunged her government into crisis.

May said British MPs will be able to vote on whether or not to hold a second Brexit referendum -- but only if they approve draft legislation to implement the divorce agreement with the EU.

The government would also allow parliament to decide whether to remain temporarily in a customs union with the European Union, she said.

May outlined a series of incentives for MPs to support her Brexit deal, saying there was "one last chance" to end the deadlock, reported AFP.

The cabinet earlier agreed the idea of a temporary customs relationship until the next general election, and measures on the environment and workers' rights.

These will be included in the Withdrawal

Agreement Bill, to be put to a vote in the Commons in early June.

The SNP and some Tory Brexiters have already said they will vote against.

May wants to get her withdrawal deal, agreed with the EU in November, through parliament, so, as promised, she can leave office having at least finalised the first part of Britain's departure and prevented a "no deal" Brexit, an abrupt departure that many businesses fear will create an economic shock.

May's finance minister, Philip Hammond, rammed the point home in parliament yesterday when he said a no deal Brexit would leave Britain poorer. He is expected to send the same message to business leaders in a speech later in the day, reported Reuters.

"The 2016 Leave campaign was clear that we would leave with a deal," he said.

"So to advocate for 'no deal' is to hijack the result of the referendum, and in doing so, knowingly to inflict damage on our economy and our living standards. Because all the preparation in the world will not avoid the consequences of no deal."



Algerian students scuffle with riot police during a demonstration in the capital Algiers yesterday. Algeria's army chief urged demonstrators on Monday to accept presidential polls set for July 4 to elect a successor to ousted president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. PHOTO: AFP

SUBPOENA FOR FINANCIAL RECORDS

Trump loses lawsuit

REUTERS, Washington

A US judge on Monday ruled in favor of a US House of Representatives committee seeking President Donald Trump's financial records from his accounting firm, dealing an early setback to the Trump administration in its legal battle with Congress.

US District Judge Amit Mehta in Washington also denied a request by Trump to stay his decision pending an appeal.

Last Tuesday Mehta heard oral arguments on whether Mazars LLP must comply with a House of Representatives Oversight Committee subpoena.

Mehta said in Monday's ruling that the committee "has shown that it is not engaged in a pure fishing expedition for the President's financial records" and that the Mazars documents might assist Congress in passing laws and performing other core functions.

"It is simply not fathomable that a Constitution that grants Congress the power to remove a President for reasons including criminal behavior would deny Congress the power to investigate him for unlawful conduct - past or present - even without formally

opening an impeachment inquiry," Mehta said.

Mehta said Mazars has seven days to comply with the subpoena. It was the first time a federal court had waded into the tussle about how far Congress can go in probing Trump and his business affairs.

Trump told reporters the decision was "crazy" and that it would be appealed.

"It's totally the wrong decision by obviously an Obama-appointed judge," Trump said.

Trump is refusing to cooperate with a series of investigations on issues ranging from his tax returns and policy decisions to his Washington hotel and his children's security clearances.

The standoff deepened on Monday when Trump told former White House counsel Don McGahn to defy a subpoena to testify about Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation before a different congressional committee.

Trump's lawyers have argued that Congress is on a quest to "turn up something that Democrats can use as a political tool against the president now and in the 2020 election."



'Help! There is a molester'

Japan anti-groper app becomes smash hit

AFP, Tokyo

A Tokyo police smartphone app to scare off molesters has become a smash hit in Japan, where women have long run the gauntlet of groping on packed rush-hour trains.

Victims of groping can activate the Digi Police app, which either blasts out a voice shouting "stop it" at top volume, or produces a full-screen SOS message -- which victims can show other passengers -- reading: "There is a molester. Please help."

The app has been downloaded more than 237,000 times, an "unusually high figure" for a public service app, said police official Keiko Toyamine.

"Thanks to its popularity, the number is increasing by some 10,000 every month," Toyamine told AFP.

Victims are often too scared to call out for help, she said. But by using the SOS message mode, "they can notify other passengers about groping while remaining silent."

There were nearly 900 groping and



other harassment cases on Tokyo trains and subways reported in 2017, according to the latest available data from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department.

"But it's the tip of the iceberg," Toyamine said, with victims often hesitant to come forward.

Offenders face up to six months in jail or fines of up to 500,000 yen (\$5,500 dollars). The potential jail sentence is increased to 10 years if violence or threats are used.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department quietly launched the free Digi Police app three years ago.

CHRISTCHURCH MOSQUE MASSACRE

Attacker charged with terrorism

AFP, Wellington

The man accused of shooting dead 51 Muslim worshippers in the Christchurch mosque attacks was formally charged with terrorism for the first time yesterday, New Zealand police said.

In addition to the terror charge, Brenton Tarrant also faces 51 charges of murder and 40 of attempted murder over the March 15 attacks that rocked the South Pacific nation.

"The charge will allege that a terrorist act was carried out in Christchurch," police said in a statement.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has characterised the mosque killings as "a well-planned terrorist attack" since the day Tarrant, a self-described white supremacist, allegedly carried them out.

But until now the charges against him were less expansive, as New Zealand's Terrorism Suppression Act was only introduced in 2002 and is untested in the courts.

Police said the decision to lay the terror charge more than two months after the attack was made following consultation with prosecutors and government legal experts.

Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian, is currently in a high-security prison undergoing tests to determine if he is mentally fit to stand trial for the worst massacre in modern New Zealand history.

His next court appearance is scheduled for June 14.

Ahead of the shooting, Tarrant posted a rambling manifesto on social media in which he identified himself by name and described himself as a white supremacist out to avenge attacks in Europe perpetrated by Muslims.

He live-streamed himself as he opened fire in the packed Al Noor mosque during Friday prayers and then travelled across town to continue the carnage in the suburban Linwood mosque.

Pressure at top Russian daily triggers walkout

The entire politics desk of one of Russia's top daily newspapers, Kommersant, quit on Monday in protest over censorship after two veteran reporters were fired. The walkout at the newspaper controlled by pro-Kremlin tycoon Alisher Usmanov is a rare protest in the Russian media industry where nearly all print outlets toe the government line. Ivan Safronov and Maxim Ivanov, both of whom worked for a decade at the newspaper, last month wrote an article saying Valentina Matvienko, speaker of the Russian parliament's upper house, could be replaced by Sergei Naryshkin, head of the SVR intelligence service. Kommersant editor-in-chief Vladimir Zhelonkin said the reporters had been sacked because they violated "journalistic standards". Earlier Monday, deputy editor Gleb Cherkasov said he and another ten journalists -- who make up Kommersant's political desk -- quit in solidarity after the management forced the two reporters to resign.

Pro-Maduro assembly extends rule in Venezuela

Venezuela's Constituent Assembly, made up entirely of loyalists of President Nicolas Maduro, announced Monday it has extended its mandate to rule the crisis-stricken country for another 18 months until the end of 2020. The move comes a year after the contested re-election of embattled Maduro, locked in a struggle for power with Juan Guaido, who has declared himself interim president and is backed by more than 50 countries including the United States. In a decree approved unanimously and which applies immediately, the Constituent Assembly extended its functioning "at least until December 31, 2020." The pro-Maduro body has effectively sidelined and replaced Venezuela's opposition-dominated National Assembly, which is led by Guaido.

Rival protests as Widodo re-elected in Indonesia

Thousands of soldiers fanned out across Jakarta yesterday after the surprise early announcement of official results in Indonesia's election showed Joko Widodo re-elected leader of the world's third-biggest democracy. The election commission had been due to give the final tally of the divisive poll today, but the results were revealed early yesterday with little advance notice amid fears of unrest. Presidential challenger Prabowo Subianto, meanwhile, rejected the results but called for supporters to remain calm and said his camp would pursue "legal avenues". Subianto's legal director was quoted by Indonesian media as saying a formal appeal would be filed at the Constitutional Court. Subianto unsuccessfully challenged Widodo's 2014 victory over him at the same court. SOURCE: AFP

