

Algeria cannot hold a presidential election planned for July 4 due to a lack of valid candidates, its constitutional council said yesterday, prolonging the country's transition after President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned two months ago. The move will likely extend the rule of interim President Abdelkader Bensalah, who was meant to stay only until the vote to elect a new president after Bouteflika ended his 20-year rule in the wake of mass protests.

Three blasts hit Kabul, killing 1, injuring 17

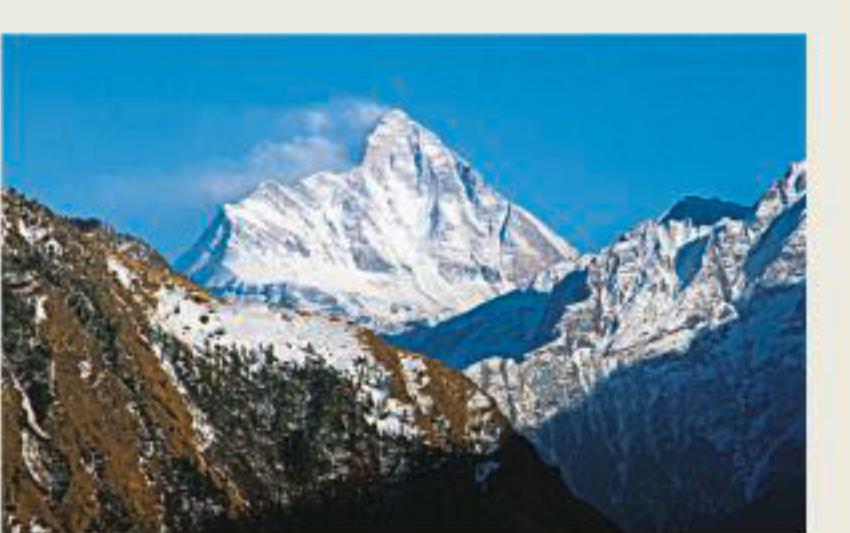
AFP, Kabul

One person was killed and 17 others wounded yesterday in three successive blasts in Kabul, Afghan officials said, capping a murderous week of mayhem across the city. The events started with the detonation of a sticky bomb -- a growing menace in Kabul, where insurgents and criminals slap magnetic bombs on the underside of vehicles. The charge had been placed under a bus carrying officials headed to the Kabul Education University, a source said. In the immediate aftermath, two more bombs that had been planted by the side of the road went off, he added.

10 killed in car bomb attack in Raqa

AFP, Beirut

Ten people were killed and 20 wounded Saturday in a suicide car bomb attack in Raqa, a former stronghold of the Islamic State group (IS) in north Syria, a rights watchdog said. The explosion claimed the lives of five civilians and five soldiers of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab alliance backed by Washington. No one claimed responsibility.



4 rescued, 8 still missing on avalanche-hit Indian peak

Four British climbers have been rescued from an avalanche-hit Himalayan mountain range, Indian authorities said yesterday, as a frantic search continued for eight other mountaineers still missing on its treacherous heights. Helicopters airlifted the rescued group to safety after they were spotted early yesterday at a base camp near India's second highest mountain, the 7,826-metre Nanda Devi. Scores of emergency workers were combing the peaks on foot and using two choppers as rescue operations entered a second day, having been hampered by rough weather on Saturday. The eight missing climbers -- four Britons, two Americans, an Australian woman and an Indian -- were last week set to scale an unclimbed summit in the mountain range.



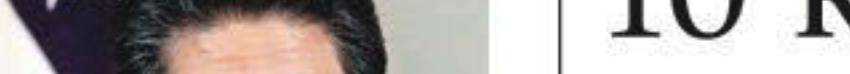
India heatwave heat pass 50 degree Celsius

Temperatures passed 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in northern India as an unrelenting heatwave triggered warnings of water shortages and heatstroke. The thermometer hit 50.6 degrees Celsius (123 Fahrenheit) in the Rajasthan desert city of Churu on Saturday, the weather department said. All of Rajasthan suffered in severe heat with several cities hitting maximum temperatures above 47 Celsius. In May 2016, Phalodi in Rajasthan recorded India's highest-ever temperature of 51 Celsius (123.8 Fahrenheit). The Indian Meteorological Department said severe heat could stay for up to a week across Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh states. Several deaths from heatstroke have already been recorded.

Breast cancer drug found to boost survival rates by 30%

A new form of drug drastically improves survival rates of younger women with the most common type of breast cancer, researchers said on Saturday, citing the results of an international clinical trial. The findings, presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Chicago, showed that the addition of cell-cycle inhibitor ribociclib increased survival rates to 70 percent after three and a half years. The mortality rate was 29 percent less when patients, all under 59 and pre-menopausal, were randomly assigned a placebo. Lead author Sara Hurvitz told AFP the study focused on a form of breast cancer which is fueled by the hormone estrogen and which accounts for two-thirds of all cases among younger women. The treatment is less toxic than traditional chemotherapy because it more selectively targets cancerous cells, blocking their ability to multiply.

SOURCE: AFP



Abe to meet Khamenei to mediate with US: report

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will meet Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei later this month with Tokyo hoping to mediate between Washington and Tehran, a report said yesterday.

As tensions intensify between Iran and Japan's key ally the United States, Abe has reportedly proposed serving as a go-between and is said to be weighing up a state visit to Iran.

According to the Mainichi Shimbun report, Abe's planned meeting with influential Khamenei will be the first such talks between a Japanese premier and Tehran's supreme leader.

US President Donald Trump said last week he remained open to talks with Tehran during his state visit to Tokyo, appearing to have given the green light to Abe's plan.

Abe will also meet Iran's president Hassan Rouhani before meeting Khamenei during his tour to Iran from June 12 to 14, the newspaper said, citing unnamed government sources.

Before Trump flew to Japan, the US had announced it was sending 1,500 extra troops to the region, adding to the aircraft carrier group and nuclear-capable bomber planes already dispatched.

Trump himself threatened "the official end" of the country if Tehran ever attacked US interests.

China won't be bullied by US

Says defense minister as rivals clash on trade and regional security

REUTERS, Cnn

China's defense minister yesterday issued a stern rebuke to the United States amid the ongoing trade war and tension over the South China Sea and Taiwan, saying his country would "not let others prey on or divide us."

Gen. Wei Fenghe told delegates at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier defence summit, in Singapore that Beijing would not yield an inch of territory -- and any foreign interference was doomed to failure.

On Saturday, acting US Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan told the meeting that the United States would no longer "tiptoe" around Chinese behaviour in Asia.

Gen Wei Fenghe warns US over interference in Taiwan, South China Sea

Wei says war with US would be a disaster for the world

Minister defends Tiananmen, Uighur crackdown



It was the latest exchange of acerbic comments between the two sides as their ties come under increasing strain due to a bitter trade war, US support for Taiwan and China's muscular military posture in the South China Sea, where the United States also conducts freedom-of-navigation patrols.

China has been particularly incensed by recent moves by President Donald Trump's administration to increase support for self-ruled and democratic Taiwan, including US Navy sailings through the Taiwan Strait that separates the island from China.

Wei said China would "fight to the end" if anyone tried to interfere in its relationship with Taiwan.

"If anyone dares to split Taiwan from China, the Chinese military has



no choice but to fight at all costs ... The U.S. is indivisible, and so is China. China must be, and will be, reunified."

He however said both sides realised that any war between the two "would bring disaster to both countries and the world."

While Shanahan's speech was critical of China, his tone was often conciliatory. Wei took a more combative approach.

Wei, in a clear reference to the US, also said: "Some countries from outside the region come to the South China Sea to flex muscles in the name of freedom of navigation."

This week will mark 30 years since a bloody Chinese military crackdown on protesters around Beijing's Tiananmen Square, refocusing scrutiny on China's approach to security threats.

Taking questions from the floor, Wei defended the government's handling of the Tiananmen "incident", a rare official acknowledgement of the events of June 4, 1989; references to it are heavily censored in China.

"The government was decisive in stopping the turbulence," Wei said of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Due to this, China has enjoyed stability, and if you visit China you can understand that part of history."

Wei defended China's detention of hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs in Xinjiang province for economic and security reasons.

"The policy of China in Xinjiang is absolutely right. Because over the past more than two years there is no single terrorist attack in Xinjiang. The living standard of the local people has improved," he said.

Wei also blamed Washington for the ongoing trade war.

"As for the recent trade friction started by the US, if the US wants to talk we will keep the door open. If they want to fight, we will fight until the end," he said.

"Bully us? No way," he added.

Participants throw coloured powder as they celebrate after finishing the Colour Run race in Moscow, Russia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



10 killed in Israeli attack in Syria following rocket fire

AFP, Beirut

Israel carried out air strikes in Syria yesterday in response to rare rocket fire from the neighbouring country, its military said, with a war monitor reporting 10 killed including Syrian soldiers and foreign fighters.

Israel's army said two rockets were fired from Syria at Mount Hermon in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights late Saturday and one had been "located within Israeli territory."

In response, the army attacked "two Syrian artillery batteries, a number of observation and intelligence posts on the Golan Heights, and an SA-2 aerial defence battery," its statement said.

The Israeli attack left three Syrian soldiers and seven foreign fighters dead, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

According to the Britain-based war monitor, which did not specify the nationality of the foreign fighters, they died in missile strikes close to the capital Damascus where Syrian troops, Iranian forces and Hezbollah fighters are stationed.

Syrian anti-aircraft defences fired against "enemy missiles" from Israel targeting positions in southwest Damascus, the official SANA news agency quoted a military source as saying.

The Israeli army said its own aerial defence systems were activated due to the Syrian anti-aircraft fire, but none of the Syrian fire hit Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had ordered the strike.

"We won't tolerate fire at our territory and will respond forcefully to any aggression against us," he said.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria, most of them against what it says are Iranian and Hezbollah targets.

Israel says it is determined to prevent its arch foe Iran from entrenching itself militarily in Syria, where Tehran backs President Bashar al-Assad in the country's eight-year war which has killed more than 370,000 people.

The Jewish state insists that it has the right to continue to target positions in Syria held by Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah out of self-defence.

FAILURE TO PREVENT SRI LANKA EASTER ATTACKS

Suspended top cop blames Sirisena

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's suspended police chief has petitioned the Supreme Court, accusing President Maithripala Sirisena of failing to prevent the Easter bombings that killed 258 people.

A 20-page complaint, Inspector-General Pujith Jayasundara disclosed serious communication gaps between intelligence agencies and security arms of the government, all which fall under Sirisena.

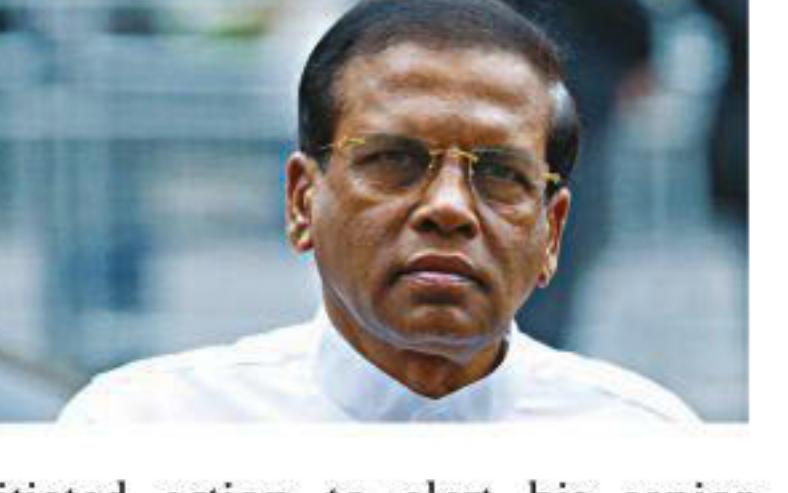
In the petition submitted to court last week and seen by AFP yesterday, Jayasundara said the country's premier spy agency, the State Intelligence Service (SIS), ordered him last year to stop ongoing police investigations into Islamic militants.

The SIS, which reports directly to Sirisena, wanted the police Terrorist Investigation Department to stop all inquiries into extremist Muslim factions, including the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), which was blamed for the Easter Sunday bombings.

Jayasundara said he was offered a diplomatic post if he took the fall and stepped down, but he refused as he said he was not responsible for the catastrophic intelligence failure.

Jayasundara said despite the SIS not sharing information warnings with the police department, he had initiated action to alert his senior men, but he had no input from the main spy agency.

Sirisena suspended Jayasundara after he refused to accept responsibility for the deadly attacks. The Attorney General has asked for a full bench of the apex court to decide the case.



Jayasundara said he was offered a diplomatic post if he took the fall and stepped down, but he refused as he said he was not responsible for the catastrophic intelligence failure.

He said he had been sidelined by the president since a political rift between the president and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe emerged in October.

Jayasundara's petition came days after Sirisena publicly rebuked another intelligence official, Sisira Mendis, after he told a parliamentary panel that the Easter suicide bombings could have been avoided.

Mendis's testimony appeared to put Sirisena in a poor light by implying he had not held National Security Council meetings to review threats such as the attacks carried out by Islamic State.

In a statement, Sirisena denied claims by Mendis that the country's highest security body had not met as often as it should have around the time of the attacks, which were blamed on Islamic State-backed militants.



People pray during a vigil for the community at St John's Baptist Church a day after a mass shooting in Virginia Beach, Virginia, on Saturday. Eleven city workers and one private contractor were killed by suspected shooter and city engineer DeWayne Craddock on Friday at the Municipal Center.

New questions over Merkel's coalition as SPD chief resigns

AFP, Berlin

The leader of Chancellor Angela Merkel's junior coalition partner SPD said yesterday she was resigning as her party's chief, raising the possibility that Germany's embattled government could collapse.

Andrea Nahles, who heads the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), has come under intense pressure after voters handed the party its worst outcome in European elections a week ago.

With an eye on three key state elections in eastern Germany in September, the SPD had initially planned to re-examine its partnership with Merkel's centre-right CDU-CSU alliance in the autumn.

But ahead of a planned parliamentary leadership vote on Tuesday, Nahles said she would give up her jobs as both party chief and head of its parliamentary group.

"The discussions in the parliamentary group and the broad feedback from the party showed me that the support necessary

for the exercise of my offices is no longer there," said Nahles in a statement.

The 48-year-old said she hoped her resignation "would open the possibility that the succession can take place in an orderly manner".

Harald Christ, deputy chief of the SPD's economy forum, told the Bild daily however that Nahles's decision had put the future of the coalition in serious doubt.

"To all those who are happy today: it is a great loss for German politics. Nahles stands for the existence of the GroKo -- whose stability is now in question," he said, using the German short-form for grand coalition.

The alliance between Merkel's Christian Democrats and the SPD has been fragile from the start. Stung by a election in 2017, the SPD had initially sought to go into opposition.

But it was reluctantly coaxed into renewing a partnership with Merkel, even as many within the party remain wary of continuing to govern in her shadow.



Andrea Nahles