

4 killed as govt bus hit
in Kabul blast

AFP, Kabul

At least four people were killed yesterday when a bomb tore through a bus in Kabul, an official said, marking the second day straight that attackers have targeted a bus. The vehicle was taking workers home from a government watchdog agency ahead of the Eid holidays marking the end of Ramadan when the bomb exploded. A government spokesman told AFP the bomb had been concealed on a bicycle along the side of the road.

Bodies found in search
for climbers in India

AFP, Pithoragarh

A helicopter searching for eight climbers including seven foreigners missing on India's second-highest peak spotted bodies yesterday, a military source said. "Some bodies were visible during the helicopter recce. They were on the same route as the climbers had taken," the source said, requesting anonymity. "The chances of survival are very, very bleak at a height of 15-18,000 feet in such a cold climate. It is almost impossible they are alive," the source added.

Boeing finds defect in
some 737 MAX planes

AFP, Washington

Boeing announced Sunday that some of its medium-haul 737s, including the 737 MAX 8, could have a defective wing part, but that there had been no reports of flight issues linked to the defect. The American aviation giant said a subcontractor informed it of problems with a batch of a part involved in deploying the wings' leading edge. The leading edge of an aircraft is key to takeoff and landing because it is meant to improve the wing's drag and therefore the jet's aerodynamics. Boeing said in a statement that it had relayed the defective lot number to aircraft owners so they can inspect the parts in question.

Iran president
rules out talks
until US acts
'normal'

AFP, Tehran

Iran's president yesterday ruled out negotiations with Washington until it acts "normal", after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US is ready to talk to Tehran without preconditions.

"The party that has left the negotiating table, the party that has trampled the pact must return to a normal" behaviour, Hassan Rouhani said in a televised speech.

"If the enemy truly realises that the path it took was wrong, that will be the day to sit at the negotiation table and fix any issue," the president added.

Tensions have spiked in recent weeks between Tehran and Washington, which last year pulled out of a landmark Iran-nuclear accord and imposed tough sanctions on the Islamic republic.

But Washington's top diplomat appeared to soften the US stance on Sunday, saying "we are prepared to engage in a conversation with no preconditions."

Washington is "certainly prepared to have (a) conversation when the Iranians will prove they are behaving as a normal nation," Pompeo said in Switzerland, which represents Washington's interests in Iran in the absence of bilateral relations.

Pompeo however gave no indication that lifting sanctions would be on the table.



Members of the Syrian Civil Defence (known as the White Helmets) carry a wounded man on a stretcher following a reported air strike on the town of Maaret al-Numan in the jihadist-held Idlib province yesterday. Inset, smoke plumes following reported airstrikes on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib.

PHOTO: AFP



Sudan protests dispersed

13 dead, 116 hurt as military rulers break up sit-in; western officials hold military council responsible

REUTERS, Khartoum

Security forces stormed a protest camp in the Sudanese capital Khartoum yesterday morning and at least 13 people were reported killed in the worst violence since the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir in April.

Footage shared on social media and verified by Reuters showed chaotic scenes of people fleeing through streets as sustained bursts of gunfire crackled in the air. People rushed to carry away those who had been hit. Witnesses said a sit-in next to the Defence Ministry, the focal point of anti-government protests that started in December, had been cleared, but protesters poured onto the streets elsewhere in Khartoum and beyond in response to the crackdown.

The main protest group accused the ruling military council of breaking up the camp, calling the action "a massacre". The military council denied trying to break up the camp and said security forces had targeted "unruly" groups nearby.

An alliance of protest and opposition groups said it was halting all contact with the military council. The two sides had been negotiating for weeks over who should govern in a transitional period after Bashir's overthrow, though the talks had stalled. The Transitional Military Council (TMC)

had offered to let protesters form a government but insisted on maintaining overall authority during an interim period.

Demonstrators want civilians to run the transitional period and lead Sudan's 40 million people to democracy. A group of doctors linked to the opposition said 13 "martyrs" had been killed in yesterday's violence, and that at least 116 people had been wounded.

It said security forces had surrounded one Khartoum hospital and had opened fire at another where they were pursuing protesters. "The protesters holding a sit-in in front of the army general command are facing a massacre in a treacherous attempt to disperse the protest," said the Sudanese Professionals Association, the group that has spearheaded protests. It urged the Sudanese people to come to their aid.

The British Ambassador in Khartoum said he had heard heavy gunfire for more than an hour from his residence and he was extremely concerned. "No excuse for any such attack. This. Must. Stop. Now," Ambassador Irfan Siddiqi wrote on Twitter.

The US Embassy in Khartoum also described the attack on the protest camp as "wrong" and said it must stop. "Responsibility falls on the TMC," the embassy said on its Twitter account.



Free transport for 8.5 lakh women in Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

Almost a million women will enjoy free public transport as part of an attempt to make the Indian capital safer, New Delhi's government said yesterday.

The city has been notorious for women's safety since the 2012 gang rape and murder of a female student on a Delhi bus that sparked major protests.

The measure will be rolled out in the next two-to-three months for around 850,000 women.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said it would cost about \$115 million a year, but would improve security and cut traffic pollution.

The regional government is also looking to install 150,000 CCTV cameras across the capital this year, Kejriwal added.

Delhi, home to nearly 20 million people, is also one of the world's most polluted cities, according to UN studies.

"Women will be allowed to travel free of cost so that they have safe travel experience," Kejriwal told a press conference.

Delhi has a rickety public transport system, and the doubling of some metro fares in recent months has forced many people onto the streets.

Some commentators accused Kejriwal, head of the small Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), of making the gesture to win votes in state elections expected in January.



An Indian man distributes free cold sweet water on a highway during a hot afternoon at Garhi village in the northern Indian state of Haryana yesterday. Temperatures in an Indian desert city hit 50 degrees Celsius for the second time in three days as a deadly heatwave maintained its grip on the country.

Prosecute top
EU officials

Int'l lawyers tell ICC over migrant deaths in Med

AFP, The Hague

Top European Union and member states' officials should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity over the drownings of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, international lawyers said yesterday.

The Paris-based lawyers presented the International Criminal Court with a detailed 245-page file which they said was handed to chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's office.

The information provides "enough evidence implicating the EU and member states officials and agents with crimes against humanity committed in pursuant to EU migration policies in the Mediterranean and Libya" since 2014, they said.

More than 12,000 people have died since 2014 trying to flee Libya to Europe by what the UN refugee agency calls the "world's deadliest sea crossing".

The lawyers alleged that in order to keep Europe's borders safe, the EU resorted to a "deterrence-based migration policy, intended to sacrifice the lives of migrants in distress at sea".

The sole objective was to "dissuade others in similar situation from seeking safe haven in Europe," they said in their filing, of which a copy was handed to AFP.

When the policy failed because of rescue work by NGOs, the EU adopted a second strategy by employing the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept and send migrants back to concentration-camp like facilities in Libya.

"It was perfectly clear that they were people accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity and they (the EU) voluntarily funded these individuals," lawyer Juan Branco told AFP.

The council said Beijing had been telling lies to cover up the events of 1989 and distorting the truth.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, asked about Taiwan's statement, said the great achievements since the People's Republic of China was founded 70 years ago "fully prove that the development path we have chosen is completely correct".

China's widely read tabloid the Global Times said in an editorial on the website of its English-language edition that June 4 had "immunised China against turmoil".

"Merely afflicting China once, the incident has not become a long-term nightmare for the country," the paper, published by the ruling Communist Party's official People's Daily, said.

"It has become a faded historical event, rather than an actual entanglement," it added, blasting dissidents and those outside the country who keep talking about it.



India's NSA Ajit Doval gets extension, given cabinet rank

Ajit Doval has been granted cabinet status and five more years as the National Security Adviser (NSA). "He has been given cabinet rank in recognition of his contribution in the national security domain," officials said. There had been much speculation about Ajit Doval after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took oath for the second time last week, with his longtime aide Amit Shah as the new Home Minister and former Home Minister Rajnath Singh moving to Defence. Ajit Doval, as the man in charge of the national security establishment that includes all anti-terror and intelligence offices, is among the most powerful officers in the country. The 1968-batch Indian Police Service officer was a former Intelligence Bureau chief. Doval oversaw the Balakot air strike after the Pulwama terror attack and the 2016 surgical strikes after the Uri strike.

Trump slams CNN owner, suggests boycott of AT&T

US President Donald Trump yesterday appeared to call for a boycott of AT&T in order to force "big changes" at CNN after criticizing the cable news network's coverage as he began a visit to Britain. "I believe that if people stopped using or subscribing to AT&T, they would be forced to make big changes at CNN, which is dying in the ratings anyway," he said in a tweet with a spelling mistake. "It is so unfair with such bad, fake news! Why wouldn't they act. When the world watches @CNN, it gets a false picture of USA. Sad!" Trump has had a running feud with CNN, which was acquired by AT&T earlier this year in a merger with Time-Warner that was unsuccessfully opposed by the Justice Department. The president complained on arriving in Britain that he had watched CNN "for a short while" as a primary source of US news but turned it off.

Swedish court rejects request to detain Assange

A Swedish court yesterday rejected a request to detain Julian Assange over a 2010 rape case, dashing the prosecutor's hopes of having him swiftly extradited from Britain. The Uppsala district court said that while it considered the WikiLeaks founder "a suspect" in the case, the fact that Assange was currently in prison in Britain meant he does not need to be formally detained in Sweden to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors. Swedish deputy director of public prosecutions Eva-Marie Persson said the WikiLeaks founder had not cooperated with the Swedish investigation previously, fleeing from an extradition order, and therefore needed to be detained and questioned in Sweden. She asked the court to order Assange's detention in his absence, a standard part of Swedish legal procedure if a suspect is outside the country or cannot be located, and which would be the first step to having him extradited. Assange's Swedish lawyer, Per E Samuelson, meanwhile argued that a detention order was "meaningless" as Assange is currently imprisoned in Britain.

FAILURE TO PREVENT EASTER ATTACKS

Sri Lanka Muslim ministers
resign en masse after protests

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Muslim ministers resigned en masse yesterday over widespread hate attacks against their community in the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings that hit the majority Buddhist nation.

The resignation of nine government legislators, several of them cabinet ministers, came after a Buddhist monk lawmaker supporting President Maithripala Sirisena demanded the sacking of three top Muslim politicians.

Demonstrations by several thousand people gripped the central pilgrimage city of Kandy as monk Athuraliye Ratana insisted governors of two provinces and a cabinet minister be sacked over their alleged involvement with jihadists responsible for the bombings.

As shops and offices were closed in the city 115 kilometres (70 miles) east of Colombo, the two provincial governors stepped down, Sirisena's



office said. Within hours, the nine legislators, belonging to several Muslim and mainstream parties, resigned saying they were giving up their portfolios to ensure free investigations into the Easter attacks. The nine included Commerce Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, the cabinet minister whose sacking had been demanded by Ratana.

Muslim leaders said their community -- which consists of 10 percent of Sri Lanka's 21 million population -- had become victims of violence, hate speech and harassment since Islamic extremists were held responsible for the bombings.

The ministers who quit yesterday will remain loyal to the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, they said in a joint statement.

Sri Lanka is under a state of emergency since the Easter attacks.

Purged no more

N Korean official appears at show

AFP, Seoul

A senior North Korean official appeared at an arts performance with the country's top brass, official media reported yesterday, just three days after he was said to have been purged following the collapse of nuclear talks between leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump.

Kim Yong Chol, the North's counterpart to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the nuclear negotiations, was sent to a labour camp after the Kim-Trump summit in Hanoi in February, South Korea's Chosun Ilbo newspaper had reported Friday.

The paper had also made worldwide headlines by saying that Kim Hyok Chol, North Korea's special envoy to the United States, had been executed by firing squad in March, after the two leaders failed to come to a deal over sanctions relief and the North's nuclear programme.

Kim Hyok Chol was Pyongyang's counterpart to US special representative Stephen Biegun in the run-up to Hanoi, and the Chosun Ilbo said he had been put to death for "betraying the Supreme Leader" after he was "won over to the US" during pre-summit negotiations.

But the North is difficult to report on as one of the world's most isolated nations and some previous Southern reports of purges and executions by Pyongyang have later proved inaccurate.

SOURCE: AFP, NDTV