

NEWS IN brief

Putin to visit Saudi Arabia in October

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Saudi Arabia, a traditional U.S. ally in the Middle East, in October this year, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said yesterday. Falih, who was in Moscow for talks with his Russian counterpart, said Saudi companies were considering taking part in a methanol plant project in Russia's east, the Interfax news agency reported.

Google makes billions from news: study

AFP, Washington

Google took in some \$4.7 billion in revenue in 2018 from "crawling and scraping" news websites without paying publishers, according to a media industry-sponsored study released yesterday. The study by the News Media Alliance underscores industry arguments about Google and other online giants harming traditional news organizations by dominating the internet news ecosystem and ad revenues generated through it. The report is expected to be presented this week to a congressional hearing on antitrust abuses by Big Tech firms.

Sudan releases 3 detained rebels

AFP, Khartoum

Sudanese authorities yesterday released three prominent rebels who were detained after a brutal crackdown on protesters last week that left dozens dead in Khartoum, state television reported. Yasir Arman, deputy chief of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), was released along with two other leading rebels from the group, Ismail Jalab and Mubarak Ardol, it said, but did not specify when. A nationwide civil disobedience campaign by Sudanese protesters entered a second day yesterday. Some shops opened and buses plied the streets of Khartoum.

J&K CHILD RAPE, MURDER

Indian court jails 3 Hindu men for life

Three cops sentenced to 5 years in prison

AP, Srinagar

An Indian court yesterday sentenced three Hindu men, including a police officer, to life imprisonment for kidnapping, raping and murdering an 8-year-old Muslim girl in Indian-controlled Kashmir, in a case that has exacerbated tensions in the disputed region. Judge Tejwinder Singh sentenced three other policemen to five years in prison for destroying evidence, prosecutor Santokh Singh told reporters. The judge acquitted another defendant due to insufficient evidence. An eighth suspect, a minor, will be tried separately by a juvenile court, Santokh Singh said. The girl, who was a member of a nomadic tribe, was grazing her family's ponies in the forests of the Himalayan foothills when she was kidnapped in January 2018. Her mutilated body was found in the woods a week later.

The case sparked protests across Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region where rebels have been fighting for years for independence or unification with Pakistan and there is great distrust of the government. Singh said prosecutors plan to appeal to a higher court and seek the death penalty for the three defendants who received life sentences. Thousands of members of a radical Hindu group had demanded the release of the defendants. The trial was shifted to Pathankot following accusations that local Hindu leaders and politicians were trying to block the investigation.



Police officers detain an opposition supporter as journalists take pictures during a protest against presidential election results, in Almaty, Kazakhstan yesterday. Kazakhstan elected Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the hand-picked successor of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev, with more than 70 percent of the vote, electoral authorities said, after an election day marred by protests.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US can't expect to stay safe

Iranian FM issues fresh warning over economic war; IAEA calls for de-escalation through dialogue

AGENCIES

Iran's foreign minister warned the US yesterday that it "cannot expect to stay safe" after launching what he described as an economic war against Tehran, taking a hard-line stance amid a visit by Germany's top diplomat seeking to defuse tensions.

Zarif also said Iran will never start a war, but will destroy any party who invades it.

A stern-faced Zarif offered a series of threats over the ongoing tensions gripping the Persian Gulf. The crisis takes root in President Donald Trump's decision over a year ago to withdraw America from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

"One cannot expect an economic war to continue against the Iranian people and that those waging this war and those supporting it remain safe," he said at a Tehran news conference with his visiting German counterpart Heiko Maas.

"The only way to decrease tensions in the region is to stop the economic war," he said, adding that Germany and the EU had an "important role" in such efforts.

For his part, Heiko Maas insisted his country and other European nations want to find a way to salvage the nuclear deal, which saw Iran limit its enrichment of uranium in

exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, reported AP. Maas also said it was in Iran's "political and strategic interest" to stay in the nuclear deal.

However, Europe has yet to be able to offer Iran a way to get around the newly imposed US sanctions. A July 7 deadline looms for Europe to find a way to save the unravelling deal. Otherwise, Iran has warned it will resume enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade levels.

Meanwhile, UN's nuclear watchdog said yesterday it was "worried about increasing tensions" over Iran's nuclear programme, after Tehran said it might stop respecting more elements of a 2015 international deal.

"I... hope that ways can be found to reduce current tensions through dialogue," International Atomic Energy Agency director general Yukiya Amano said in a speech opening the agency's quarterly board of governors meeting.

"As I have constantly emphasised, the nuclear-related commitments entered into by Iran under the JCPOA represent a significant gain for nuclear verification," Amano said.

"It is essential that Iran fully implements its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA," he added.



PROTESTS OVER SCRAPPING OF EXTRADITION BILL

HK vows to push ahead

China strongly backs bill, opposes 'foreign interference'

AGENCIES

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam yesterday vowed to push ahead with amendments to laws allowing suspects to be extradited to mainland China a day after the city's biggest protest since its handover from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

Riot police ringed Hong Kong's legislature and fought back a hardcore group of several hundred protesters who stayed behind early yesterday after Sunday's peaceful march that organisers said drew more than a million people, or one in seven of the city's people.

"I don't think it is (an) appropriate decision for us now to pull out of this bill because of the very important objectives that this bill is intended to achieve," a sombre Lam told reporters while flanked by security and justice chiefs.

"While we will continue to do the communication and explanation there is very little merit to be gained to delay the

bill. It will just cause more anxiety and divisiveness in society."

The protests followed Hong Kong into political crisis, just as months of pro-democracy "Occupy" demonstrations did in 2014, heaping pressure on Lam's administration and her official backers in Beijing. Chants echoed through the high-rise city streets on Sunday calling on her to quit. "Extradite yourself, Carrie!", one placard read.

The rendition bill has generated unusually broad opposition, from normally pro-establishment businesspeople and

lawyers to students, pro-democracy figures and religious groups who fear further erosion of Hong Kong's legal autonomy and the difficulty of ensuring even basic judicial protections in mainland China, reported Reuters.

Meanwhile, China yesterday strongly backed the Hong Kong government on the controversial bill, reported AFP.



Rome cracks down on bad tourist behaviour

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Rome is cracking down on bad tourist behaviour, with a slew of new rules that cover everything from public snacking to drinking from water fountains.

The Italian capital has outlawed men going topless in public and the practice of attaching "love padlocks" to bridges, both of which carry a fine if contravened.

Eating messy foods around popular tourist attractions such as the Trevi Fountain is also a no-no according to the new regulations, as is touching your lips against the spout when drinking from Roman public water fountains.

The city council has updated and expanded its list of regulations, some of which date from 1947, to create a new package of rules.

"Ticket touts selling "skip the line" tickets at some of the Eternal City's biggest attractions, such as the Vatican Museums and Colosseum, are prohibited, as are those who dress up as Roman centurions around tourist hotspots and charge money for photos.

Rome authorities have also threatened "severe fines" for those caught wading or swimming in the city's fountains. Even bouncing wheeled suitcases or pushchairs up the Spanish Steps is off limits.

Some offences may just attract a slap on the wrist from police patrolling attractions, while others will incur a fine or a ban from the area.



Jagisha Arora, wife of Prashant Kanojia, a journalist who was arrested for allegedly tweeting defamatory content against Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, takes part in a protest with media members in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

India to buy US missile system to shield Delhi

TNN, New Delhi

India is swiftly moving ahead to acquire the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System-II (NASAMS-II) from the US, which will be used along with indigenous, Russian and Israeli systems to erect an ambitious multi-layered missile shield over the National Capital Territory of Delhi against aerial threats ranging from drones to ballistic missiles. Defence ministry sources said the US is likely to send the final draft of the 'letter of acceptance' for the sale of NASAMS-II to India under its foreign military sales programme, at a cost of over Rs 6,000 crore (almost \$1 billion), by July-August.

"Several rounds of negotiations, including selection of sites for deployment of the missile batteries around Delhi, have already taken place. Once the deal is inked,

the deliveries will take place in two to four years," said a source. The MoD had earlier granted 'acceptance of necessity' to the NASAMS acquisition, which was followed by India issuing a formal 'letter of request' (LoR) to the US, as reported by TOI in July last year.

Though the US is mounting pressure on India to also consider its Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) and Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missile defence systems, MoD sources said "there is no plan to scrap" the \$5.43 billion (almost Rs 40,000 crore) deal inked with Russia for five squadrons of the advanced S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile systems.

India inked the S-400 deal with Russia in October 2018 after four years of extensive negotiations and an inter-governmental agreement despite the threat of sanctions under the US law called CAATSA.



BOMB SCARE

Swedish police shoot man at train station

AFP, Stockholm

Police in the southern Swedish city of Malmo yesterday shot a man at the central train station who claimed to have a bomb, police and witnesses said.

Police said the shooting occurred shortly after 10:00 am when officers responding to emergency calls confronted a man acting in a threatening manner.

Local media quoted several witnesses as saying that the man, aged around 40, had thrown a sports bag on the ground and shouted he had a bomb.

After police approached the man he continued to behave threateningly, spokeswoman Evelina Olsson told.

"A situation developed which required a police officer to fire their service weapon," Olsson said.

The man was taken to hospital while the train station was evacuated and the bomb squad was called. Police said investigators are waiting to question him.

A police spokesman did not explain what constituted the man's behaviour, adding it was too early to say whether the event was terror-related or not.

"We are investigating if this is an isolated event, what intent this man may have had, and if he is alone," police spokesman Calle Persson said.

Persson said no explosives had been found so far but that the search of the premises continued. "We still don't know who this person is and we are working to find that out," he added.

Centre, BJP trying to incite violence in Bengal: Mamata

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee alleged yesterday that the Centre and the cadres of the ruling BJP were trying to incite violence in the state and conspiring to bring down her government. She also said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was trying to throttle her voice as she was the only one in the country to protest against them. "They (BJP) are spending crores and crores of money to spread fake news through different social networking websites. The central government and (BJP) party cadres are trying to incite violence in West Bengal," Banerjee told reporters at the state secretariat. She said the Centre also had an equal responsibility as the state governments in case any violence or riot took place in any state.

Kremlin faces pushback over reporter's arrest

The Kremlin said yesterday it was carefully monitoring the case of arrested reporter Ivan Golunov and admitted it threw up a "great number of questions". President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov however defended the law enforcement system in general, saying people make mistakes in separate cases. "We are carefully monitoring how this case is developing," Peskov told reporters. "This concrete case has triggered a great number of questions." Golunov, a 36-year-old investigative reporter with Meduza, an independent Russian-language media outlet, was detained last week over allegations that he manufactured and dealt drugs. He could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.



Tree symbolising Trump, Macron friendship has died

The photo of Donald Trump and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron planting an oak tree in the garden of the White House symbolised the friendship shown by the two leaders. But relations between them have since frayed -- over issues ranging from Iran to trade -- and the tree, a diplomatic source said this week, did not survive. The French president offered the young oak to Trump on the occasion of a state visit to Washington in 2018, and the two shovelled dirt around it under the watchful eyes of their wives -- and cameras from around the world. It was a symbolic gesture: the tree came from a northern French forest where 2,000 US Marines died during the First World War. But a few days later, the tree was nowhere to be seen, having disappeared into quarantine.

SOURCE: AFP, PTI