

NEWSIN brief

7 killed as migrant boat sinks off Lesbos

AFP, Athens

At least seven people died yesterday when a boat carrying migrants sank near the Greek island of Lesbos, the coastguard said. Assisted by an EU border patrol boat, the coastguard said it had rescued 57 people and is continuing to search for survivors. No information was given on the nationalities of the migrants. More than 300 refugees and migrants have died this year while trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, according to the International Organization for Migration.

India finds wreckage of missing plane

AFP, New Delhi

Indian authorities yesterday spotted the wreckage of a plane missing with 13 air force personnel aboard after days of searching a remote mountainous region close to China. The Soviet-built AN-32 plane, carrying eight crew and five passengers, disappeared from radar on June 3 in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, prompting a frantic search by the Indian Air Force (IAF) and ground teams. There was no news of survivors.

Pompeo to visit India on June 24

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Monday said he would visit India this month to forge closer relations with re-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pompeo told reporters that he would outline areas for new cooperation with Modi's India during a speech today in Washington ahead of his trip to New Delhi. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus, speaking after Pompeo, said the top US diplomat could leave for Delhi on June 24.



Women fetch water from an opening made by residents at a dried-up lake in Chennai, India, yesterday. Four people died in 'unbearable' heat while travelling by train in northern India, which has been in the grip of a heatwave for two weeks, officials and passengers said yesterday. Temperatures touched 50.3 degrees Celsius in the Rajasthan town of Churu recently, just below India's record of 51 degrees. PHOTO: REUTERS

Kim's brother was CIA source

Reports WSJ about estranged half-brother of N Korean leader

AGENCIES

Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un who was killed in Malaysia in 2017, was a CIA informant, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday. Citing "a person knowledgeable about the matter", the paper said Kim Jong Nam had met with CIA operatives several times.

Kim Jong Nam, who was once seen as heir apparent to the North's leadership, died after having his face smeared with the outlawed VX nerve agent as he waited at Kuala Lumpur airport. According to the Journal's source there was a "nexus" between Kim Jong Nam and the CIA, but the paper said many details of his connection with the intelligence agency were unclear.

The source said Kim Jong Nam travelled to Malaysia in February 2017 to meet his CIA contact, but that may not have been the only purpose of his trip.

Kim Jong Nam died after being attacked at Kuala Lumpur

International Airport on February 13, 2017 in a Cold War-style assassination that shocked the world.

Two young women, one Vietnamese and one Indonesian, were arrested and charged with the murder. They insisted they were tricked by North Korean agents into carrying out the hit and had thought it was a reality TV show prank.

Malaysian prosecutors eventually



North Korea urges US to change 'hostile policy' Hundreds of N Korean public execution sites identified: survey

dropped the murder charges against them and Indonesian Siti Aisyah was released in March this year while her Vietnamese co-accused Doan Thi Huong was freed in May.

Meanwhile, North Korean state media yesterday called on the US to

"withdraw its hostile policy" towards Pyongyang or agreements made at a landmark summit in Singapore a year ago might become "a blank sheet of paper".

"The arrogant and unilateral US policy will never work on the DPRK, which values sovereignty," KCNA said.

The report said a four-point joint statement signed by Trump and Kim on June 12 last year pledging to work towards a new relationship "is in danger of being a blank sheet of paper because the US is turning a blind eye to its implementation".

A rights group in its report said yesterday North Korea conducts public executions to incite fear among the public. The report by the Seoul-based Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) pinpointed at least 323 sites used by the government for capital punishment.

The report is the result of four years of research and interviews with more than 600 North Korean defectors living outside the country.

CRITICISM OF UTTAR PRADESH CM

SC orders release of jailed journo

AFP, New Delhi

A journalist jailed for making derogatory comments on social media against a chief minister with the ruling-right wing party was ordered released by India's Supreme Court yesterday.

Prashant Kanojia, a freelance journalist, was arrested Saturday after he uploaded and commented on a video of a woman claiming to be in love with Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand Hindu monk who is chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state.

"The judges have directed (the) immediate release of Prashant today," defence lawyer Shadan Farasat told reporters. Local media reports said the judges had criticised the high-handed manner of Kanojia's arrest, calling it "illegal" and "unconstitutional".

The court however said its order should not be seen as approval of Kanojia's social media posts and that legal proceedings against him would continue according to law.

The Editors Guild of India had slammed Kanojia's arrest, calling the police action "arbitrary" and "an authoritarian misuse of laws".

"The Guild sees it as an effort to intimidate the press, and stifle freedom of expression," it said in a statement on Sunday.



Prayut made Thai PM in royal decree

AFP, Bangkok

Junta chief Prayut Chan-O-cha formally became Thailand's 29th prime minister yesterday after a royal endorsement, completing a long transformation from soldier to civilian leader and vowing "love, unity and compassion".

But critics may doubt the divisive leader's pledge after his previous stint in power which was marked by a ban on political gatherings, a clamp down on the media and the muzzling of dissent.

Thailand's first parliament since the coup was stacked with 250 hand-picked senators who helped vote Prayut in as prime minister over the charismatic and embattled leader of the Future Forward party Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit.

But he holds a razor-thin majority in the lower house in a country frustrated by the military's influence on politics, with the hashtag #RIPThailand trending on Twitter after the vote.

Future Forward party scooped up 81 seats to become the third largest in Thailand.

Observers say Future Forward offered a fresh alternative for voters tired of familiar political camps.

For the past 13 years Thailand has been rocked by violent protests and takeovers in a broad split between supporters of the powerful Shinawatra clan and an arch-royalist elite backed by the military.

Canada to ban single-use plastics from 2021

Canada will ban single-use plastics from 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday, declaring it a "global challenge" to phase out the plastic bags, straws and cutlery clogging the world's oceans. "I am very pleased to announce that as early as 2021, Canada will ban harmful, single-use plastics from coast to coast," Trudeau said, arguing Canada has a unique chance to lead the fight against plastic pollution as the country with the world's longest coastlines. Less than 10 percent of plastics used in Canada are currently recycled, he said. Single-use items represent about 70 percent of the plastic waste littering the marine environment. Straws, plastic bags, cutlery, plates and stir sticks would be among the items banned, a government statement said.

New York Times to cease political cartoons

The New York Times has announced it will no longer include daily political cartoons in its international edition, weeks after apologising for publishing a caricature of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu deemed anti-Semitic. The cartoon, published in April, depicted Netanyahu as a guide dog wearing a Star of David collar and leading a blind Donald Trump -- who was wearing a kippah, or a Jewish skullcap. It prompted an uproar within the Jewish community, with Israel's ambassador to the UN likening the drawing to the content of Nazi propaganda tabloid Der Sturmer. The decision will come into effect on July 1. Patrick Chappatte, one of the paper's leading cartoonists, said the decision was directly related to the Netanyahu cartoon. He condemned the publication of the caricature but said he was concerned that media outlets were increasingly buckling under political pressure and criticism from "moralistic mobs" on social media.

World's most costly painting on Saudi prince's yacht

Since its sale for a record \$450 million, the whereabouts of the "Salvator Mundi," said to be painted by Leonardo da Vinci, has become one of the art world's greatest mysteries. On Monday, London-based art dealer Kenny Schachter, writing for the website Artnews, offered answers: the painting now resides on the gargantuan yacht owned by powerful Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Since its record-setting sale at Christie's in 2017, the painting, in which Jesus Christ is depicted emerging from darkness blessing the world with one hand while holding a transparent globe in the other, has never been exhibited in public, triggering doubts about its ownership, whereabouts and authenticity.

SOURCE: AFP



CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE CAMPAIGN IN SUDAN

Businesses shut, internet blocked

AFP, Khartoum

A protest strike kept businesses shut and residents indoors in the Sudanese capital yesterday as a top US diplomat prepared a visit to press the ruling generals to halt a bloody crackdown.

Protest leaders stepped up the pressure on the generals by announcing they would soon release a list of members for a new ruling body -- the key point of dispute between the two sides.

Most shops and businesses remained closed on the third day of a civil disobedience campaign launched by protest leaders after a crackdown on a weeks-long sit-in left dozens dead on June 3.

Public buses were operating in some parts of the capital, but Khartoum's main business and commercial districts were shut down, an AFP correspondent reported.

Protest leaders have vowed to name a new ruling body to replace the generals.

The crackdown by the military came after negotiations between protest leaders and the generals collapsed late last month over who should lead the new governing body -- a civilian or a soldier.

Since toppling longtime President Omar al-Bashir on April 11, the generals have resisted demonstrators' demands to make way for a civilian-led transition.



People transport a car on a makeshift raft across floodwaters inundating a road in Andadowi, yesterday. More than 4,000 people were forced to evacuate due to flooding in Southeast Sulawesi province.

PHOTO: AFP

PROTEST AGAINST PROPOSED EXTRADITION TO CHINA

HK braces for new mass demonstration, strikes

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong braced for strikes, transport go-slows and another mass demonstration in protest against a proposed extradition law that would allow people to be sent to China for trial, as the Chinese-ruled city's leader vowed defiance.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam said she would push ahead with the bill despite deep concerns across vast swaths of the Asian financial hub that triggered its biggest political demonstration since its handover from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

She warned against any "radical actions", following clashes in the early hours of Monday between some protesters and police after Sunday's otherwise peaceful march.

In a rare move, prominent business leaders warned that pushing through the extradition law could undermine investor confidence in Hong Kong and erode its competitive advantages.

The extradition bill is due for a second round of debate today in the city's 70-seat Legislative Council. The legislature is controlled by a pro-Beijing majority.

Britain handed Hong Kong back to China under a "one-country, two-systems" formula, with guarantees that its autonomy and freedoms, including an independent justice system, would be protected.

But many accuse China of extensive meddling, denying democratic reforms, interfering with local elections and the disappearance of five Hong Kong-based booksellers, starting in 2015, who specialised in works critical of Chinese leaders.

Roadside blast kills 6 civilians in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

At least six people including four children were killed yesterday after a roadside bomb ripped through their vehicle in southern Afghanistan.

The vehicle was travelling from Kandahar's Dand district to the provincial capital when the bomb detonated near the car, killing everyone inside, according to a provincial police spokesman.

Haji Abdullah, governor of Dand district, said the bomb was placed by the Taliban on a road frequently used by foreign and Afghan forces.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, and the Taliban were not immediately available to comment on the incident.

Democrats sign deal to get more Mueller evidence

REUTERS, Washington

Congressional Democrats on Monday struck a rare deal in their wide-ranging probes of President Donald Trump, with the US Justice Department agreeing to hand over more evidence from Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia inquiry.

The compromise, an unusual retreat by Trump in his months-long stonewalling campaign against House Democrats, came just before a House panel heard testimony for more than four hours from John Dean, a historic figure from the Watergate era.

Before Dean spoke to the House Judiciary Committee, Trump took the opportunity on Twitter to slam the former White House counsel under President Richard Nixon as a "sleazebag attorney." Nixon resigned the presidency in disgrace in 1974.

Dean told the panel there were parallels between Mueller's investigative report, released in redacted form in mid-April, and a 1974 document, known as the Watergate Road Map, in which a special prosecutor

laid out the case against Nixon. "Mueller has provided this committee with a road map," said Dean, who was part of a panel of witnesses.

Mueller's report found Russia meddled in the 2016 US presidential election and that Trump's election campaign had multiple contacts with Russian officials. But the report found insufficient evidence to establish a criminal conspiracy between the campaign and Moscow.

As part of his effort to uncover more of Mueller's findings, Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerold Nadler announced that his panel will get some of the evidence related to Trump's attempts to interfere with Mueller's probe from the Justice Department.

The committee will not see a full, unredacted copy of Mueller's report under the agreement, said Nadler, a Democrat. But lawmakers will get access to interview notes and other evidence, including "first-hand accounts of misconduct," Nadler said at the outset of the hearing.

