

NEWS IN brief

Abe's ruling bloc set to win majority

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling coalition is on course to grab a solid majority in Japan's upper house elections this month and cement his premiership, local media reported yesterday. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner Komeito are forecast to win more than 63 seats, or a majority of the 124 seats contested in the July 21 election, Kyodo News said in its opinion poll. The ruling parties "stand a good chance of reaching 77," said Kyodo, which conducted the poll on Thursday and Friday.

'IS attack' killed 7 in Mozambique

Seven people including a policeman were killed in northern Mozambique this week in a jihadist attack claimed by the Islamic State group, local sources said yesterday. The attack on Wednesday evening occurred in Lidjungo village in the Nangade district, a local source based in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province told AFP. One policeman and six civilians were killed in the attack, including two children.

UNSC calls for Libya truce as toll hits 1000

The UN Security Council called Friday for a ceasefire in Libya as the death toll from a three-month offensive on Tripoli reached 1,000, including scores killed in an air strike that hit a detention centre for migrants. The council condemned the late Tuesday attack on the Tajoura detention camp east of Tripoli that killed 53 and "stressed the need for all parties to urgently de-escalate the situation and to commit to a ceasefire", said a joint statement.



An Indian boy wades through a flooded area at Ragailong colony following monsoon rains in Dimapur, in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland, yesterday.

Regime bombings kill 14 civilians in Syria

Syrian regime bombardment has killed 14 civilians including seven children in northwestern Syria, a war monitor said yesterday, in the latest deadly raids on the embattled opposition bastion. Warplanes and helicopters late Friday carried out air strikes on Mahambel village in Idlib province, killing 13 civilians including the seven children, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. A woman was also killed early yesterday in regime rocket fire on the outskirts of the town of Khan Sheikhun in the south of the province, the Britain-based war monitor said. Idlib, a region of some three million people, many of whom fled former rebel-held areas retaken by the government, is the last major bastion of opposition to the Russia-backed Damascus government after eight years of civil war. The region on Turkey's doorstep is administered by Syria's former al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, but other jihadist and rebel groups are also present. Idlib is supposed to be protected from a major regime assault by a September deal between Moscow and Ankara, but Damascus and its Russian ally have ramped up their deadly bombardment of the region since late April. More than 520 civilians have been killed since then, according to the Observatory. The United Nations says 25 health facilities in the region have been hit, the latest including the second attack in two months on an underground hospital in the town of Kafrnabel on Thursday.

TALIBAN MORTAR ATTACK ON AFGHAN MARKET 14 killed, dozens wounded

At least 14 people were killed and dozens more wounded when a busy market in northern Afghanistan was hit by mortar fire, officials said yesterday. Fourteen civilians were killed and 40 -- including women and children -- were wounded, Rezaee told AFP. He said the Taliban had been trying to hit an army checkpoint near the market. The insurgent group did not immediately comment. Naem Musamim, Faryab's public health director, said 14 bodies and 39 wounded people including four children had been taken to local hospitals. Some victims with critical injuries were airlifted to hospitals in Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh province. Also Friday, a bomb detonated inside a Shia mosque in Ghazni city in central Afghanistan, killing two worshippers and wounding 20 more, according to Ghazni governor spokesman Aref Noori. Baz Mohammad Hemat, the director of Ghazni hospital, told AFP that one of those killed and 14 of the wounded were children. Friday is Afghanistan's day off and many children attend mosque for prayers on the day of worship. The Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate, which has a growing footprint in the country, claimed responsibility. The Sunni extremists have conducted frequent prior attacks on Shia targets. While Afghanistan is a mainly Sunni country, it has a sizeable Shia minority, mainly represented by the Hazara community. The deadly incidents come as the war between the Taliban and Afghan security forces rages on, even as Taliban officials are meeting with US negotiators in Doha in a bid to bring about an end to the conflict. An agreement with the Taliban is expected to have two main points -- a US withdrawal from Afghanistan and a commitment by the militants not to provide a base for terrorists, the main reason for the US invasion nearly 18 years ago. Today, the insurgents will meet in the Qatari capital with various representatives from Afghan society as part of a potential peace process.

Trump promises to reduce US drug prices to world's lowest

US President Donald Trump on Friday said his administration is working on an executive order to reduce US drug prices to match the lowest in the world. "We're working on a favored nations law where we pay whatever the lowest nation's price is," Trump told reporters from the White House South Lawn. "As you know, for years and years other nations paid less for drugs than we do, sometimes by 60 percent, 70 percent," he said. The president accused pharmaceutical companies of having "taken advantage of the system for a long time," with US drug prices often exceeding those in neighboring Canada and Mexico as well as Europe.

US demands El Chapo forfeit \$12.7b in drug money

Prosecutors on Friday said they were seeking \$12.7 billion from convicted Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, based on a conservative estimate of revenues from his cartel's drug sales in the United States. According to a motion filed by US Attorney Richard Donoghue, authorities are "entitled to forfeiture of all property that constitutes or is derived from the defendant's narcotics-related crimes." Based on prices for drugs quoted by various witnesses, Guzman's 25-year reign atop the Sinaloa cartel netted sales of some \$11.8 billion in cocaine, \$846 million in marijuana and \$11 million in heroin, authorities said. Guzman's lawyer, Jeffrey Lichtman, told US media that the demand is "largely an academic exercise as the government has never located or identified even a penny of this \$12.7 billion in proceeds supposedly generated by Mr. Guzman." Guzman is set to be sentenced on July 17, and is expected to be ordered to spend the rest of his life in prison.



Bezos finalizes divorce with \$38b settlement

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and MacKenzie Bezos finalized their divorce Friday to the tune of a \$38-billion settlement, Bloomberg News reported. Under the agreement, MacKenzie Bezos, 49, will receive approximately 19.7 million Amazon.com shares, giving her a four percent stake in the company valued at \$38.3 billion, and landing her at 22nd on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, the news service said. A judge in Washington state's King County finalized the divorce. Jeff Bezos, 55, will retain a 12 percent stake and remain the world's richest man. MacKenzie Bezos, a novelist, has said she would give all of her stake in The Washington Post and the space exploration firm Blue Origin to her husband as well as voting control of her remaining Amazon stock. She has also promised to donate half her fortune to charity, joining the ranks of the world's ultra-wealthy philanthropists as a signatory of the Giving Pledge.

'Jai Shri Ram' not part of West Bengal's culture

Amartya Sen says slogan imported here to 'beat up people'

for refusing to say 'Jai Shri Ram'.

Professor Sen, however, did not mention any particular incident but indicated that such incidents were growing. "We do not want to discriminate between various castes, religion or communities, but it is increasing," he said at the seminar. Later in the evening, at Jadavpur University, Professor Sen reiterated the issue of discrimination. "These days, when I hear that members of a particular community are scared and going out of their houses in this city with an element of fear, then I fail to recognise this city...the city of my pride. We need to ask questions now," he said. Professor Sen was interacting with eminent scholar Professor Chatterjee on 'Kolkata after Independence: A personal memoir' that is possibly part of his forthcoming autobiography. BJP State president Dilip Ghosh, however, said that "nobody is listening to intellectuals like Amartya Sen." He said, "Everywhere, people are raising both their hands to say 'Jai Shri Ram'. Communists are finished."



Revelers celebrate during the 'Chupinazo' (start rocket) to mark the kickoff at noon sharp of the San Fermin Festival, in front of the Town Hall of Pamplona, northern Spain, yesterday.

Lanka leader to veto military deal with US

Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena announced yesterday he will not allow his government to conclude a proposed military deal that would allow US troops free access to the island's ports. Maithripala Sirisena said he was opposed to the draft Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that the two countries are negotiating to further strengthen their military ties. Sirisena is at loggerheads with his pro-Western Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. "I will not allow any agreement that undermines our independence and sovereignty," Sirisena told a public rally in the island's south. "Several agreements currently being discussed are detrimental to our country." "I will not allow the

TELECOM SUICIDES TRIAL IN FRANCE

Maximum sentences sought for bosses

French prosecutors on Friday urged a Paris court to find the former bosses of France Telecom guilty of "moral harassment" and hand down maximum sentences over a wave of employee suicides that rocked the company and country a decade ago. Between 2008 to 2009, 35 employees of the former state-owned telecom giant, now known as Orange, took their own lives in the midst of a restructuring plan during which bosses set out to cut over a fifth of the workforce. Some of the victims, one of whom jumped out of a fifth-floor window in front of her colleagues, left notes expressing deep unhappiness at work. One man directly accused France Telecom, saying the company was "the sole cause" of his desperate act. The suicides caused much soul-searching about workplace culture, at a time when many big French companies were coming under pressure to be more competitive. Seven former France Telecom bosses, including former CEO Didier Lombard and the former head of human resources Olivier Barberot, are accused of putting in place a system of "institutional harassment" aimed at forcing workers to resign.

Trump blames teleprompter for Independence Day speech gaffe

Airports? In the 1700s? A historical flub landed in President Donald Trump's "Salute to America" speech on Thursday marking the US Independence Day holiday. While praising the victories of the Continental Army over the British during the 1775-1783 Revolutionary War, Trump mentioned how that army "took over the airports." There were, of course, no airports in the 1770s, not to mention airplanes, which were not invented until the 1900s. Trump read his prepared speech from a teleprompter behind a bulletproof lectern streaked with rain. On Friday he told reporters that the teleprompter had gone "kaput." "Actually, in the middle of that sentence it went out," Trump said of the teleprompter. "And that's not a good feeling." "I guess the rain knocked out the teleprompter, but I knew the speech very well," he said, "so I was able to do it without a teleprompter." "And it was actually hard to look at anyway, because there was rain all over it," he said. Trump also appeared at one point during the speech to mix up the Revolutionary War with the War of 1812. While talking about the Revolutionary War, Trump mentioned the "rockets' red glare," which had inspired lawyer Francis Scott Key to write the poem that became "The Star-Spangled Banner," now the US national anthem. Key wrote it after watching a British fleet bombard Fort Mchenry, in Maryland's Baltimore Harbor, in September 1814. Trump mostly stuck to his prepared text during a nearly hour-long Fourth of July speech that repeatedly lauded the US armed forces and stayed out of partisan territory.



CHINA'S XINJIANG CRACKDOWN

US lawmakers again call for sanctions

US lawmakers on Friday renewed their call for sanctions against China's top official in the Xinjiang region on the anniversary of riots that left nearly 200 dead. China cracked down hard after the July 5, 2009 rampage in Urumqi, the region's capital. Around one million Uighurs or members of other mostly Muslim, Turkic-speaking communities have been detained in a vast network of camps in the name of counterterrorism. More than 40 US lawmakers across the political spectrum on April 3 called on the Trump administration to slap sanctions on Chen Quanguo, the Communist Party secretary in Xinjiang. But the chairs of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China said the administration has not yet responded to the letter. "On this sad anniversary, we reiterate that call to hold Chinese officials accountable," said the chairs, Republican Senator Marco Rubio and Democratic Representative Jim McGovern. The Trump administration has repeatedly denounced China's treatment of Uighurs, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo likening the mass detention to Nazi-era concentration camps.

