

NEWS IN
brief

Jordan bans PUBG

AFP, Amman

Jordan on Saturday banned the hugely popular but brutal online game PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, citing its "negative effects" on the kingdom's citizens. Often likened to the blockbuster book and film series "The Hunger Games", PUBG pits marooned characters against each other in a virtual fight to the death, and has become one of the world's most popular mobile games. The move follows similar bans in Iraq, Nepal, the Indian state of Gujarat and the Indonesian province of Aceh.

Boko Haram kills 5 Nigeria troops

REUTERS, Maiduguri

Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram ambushed Nigerian soldiers in the northeast of the country, killing at least five and injuring more than a dozen, sources told Reuters yesterday. The sources said the death toll could increase as a number of soldiers were still missing after the attack on Thursday in Dambo, in Borno state in northeastern Nigeria. The soldiers had gone to the area to clear a Boko Haram camp, but were ambushed, the sources said.

Gas explosion at US mall injures 21

AFP, Plantation

A powerful explosion from a suspected gas leak ripped through a shopping mall in Florida on Saturday, injuring 21 people, the fire department said. The explosion sent debris flying across the parking lot of the Fountain Plaza shopping center, damaging an LA Fitness gym, numerous cars and blowing holes in neighboring buildings in the city of Plantation, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Miami.



Demonstrators march to the West Kowloon railway station to protest against a proposed extradition bill in Hong Kong, yesterday. Thousands of anti-government protesters rallied outside the train station linking the territory to the Chinese mainland, the latest mass show of anger as activists try to keep pressure on the city's pro-Beijing leaders.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran risks return of all sanctions

Tehran says it will breach uranium enrichment cap in hours angering world powers

AGENCIES

Iran yesterday said it will boost its uranium enrichment in a few hours above a cap set by a landmark 2015 nuclear deal, a move that could eventually culminate in the return of all international sanctions on Tehran.

In a sign of heightening tensions, France, Germany and Britain -- all

parties to the deal -- expressed concerns over Tehran's decision.

In a live news conference, senior Iranian officials said Tehran would keep reducing its commitments every 60 days, unless European signatories of the pact protect it from US sanctions imposed by US President Trump.

"We are fully prepared to enrich uranium at any level and with any amount," said Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation.

"In a few hours the technical process will come to an end and the enrichment beyond 3.67% will begin," referring to the limit set in the 2015 agreement.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said the step was extremely dangerous and again called on Europe to impose punitive sanctions on Tehran, raising the prospect of fresh regional tensions. "The enrichment of uranium is made for one reason and one reason only - it's for the creation of atomic bombs," he said.

Tehran shows no sign of caving in to

pressure from Trump in a confrontation that has taken on a military dimension, with Washington blaming Tehran for attacks on oil tankers, and Iran shooting down a US drone, prompting aborted US air strikes.

The Europeans, who object to Trump's withdrawal from the deal last year, have so far failed to salvage the pact by shielding Iran's limping economy from US sanctions.

French President Emmanuel Macron condemned Iran's decision as a "violation" of the pact which the United States pulled out of last year.

Iran has broken the terms of the deal and must immediately stop and reverse its activities, a spokesman for Britain's Foreign Office said yesterday.

A German foreign ministry spokesman gave a similar response.

Iran did leave some room for negotiations. All measures taken by Iran to scale back its commitments to the nuclear deal were "reversible" if the European signatories of the pact

fulfilled their obligations, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeted yesterday.

The Iran nuclear deal dispute resolution mechanism will not be triggered for now, said a source at Macron's Elysee office. The French government is giving itself until July 15 to try to get all parties talking again.

Under that so-called snapback, if a series of steps designed to resolve differences fails, sanctions in all previous UN resolutions would be re-imposed.

Daniel Byman, senior fellow for foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, said Iran was engaged in a tricky balancing act. "The step is meant to show domestic audiences that Iran is standing up to US pressure. It is also meant to convey a sense of risk to European audiences that Iran may provoke a crisis," he said.

Under the pact, Iran can enrich uranium to 3.67% fissile material, well below the 20% it was reaching before the deal and the roughly 90% suitable for a nuclear weapon.

URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLAN

Iran says it is open to diplomacy if all sanctions lifted

Macron warns Rouhani of consequences if nuclear deal weakened

Netanyahu calls Iran plan to breach uranium cap 'dangerous step'

UK says Iran must 'stop and reverse' plan to breach nuclear deal

Lanka on alert

Buddhist hardliners hold first meeting after Easter attacks

REUTERS, Kandy

Police lined the streets of the Sri Lankan highland town of Kandy yesterday and the army was on standby as hardline Buddhist monks gathered for their first big assembly since Easter attacks by Islamist militants on churches and hotels.

Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, the influential head of the Buddhist nationalist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), has called for as many as 10,000 clergymen from across the country to attend the meet.

The group said the gathering will decide who to back in the presidential elections later this year in the Indian Ocean island nation where Buddhists make up about 70% of the population.

Dressed in orange, Gnanasara visited one of Buddhism's most sacred temples in Kandy yesterday where a relic believed to be the Buddha's tooth is kept. Later in the day, the hardliner, who has faced allegations of inciting violence against Muslims, will address the gathering.

After visiting the temple, he told reporters they would take a "historical decision" to give leadership for the development and security of the Sinhalese.

"Today, the Sinhala ethnicity, which has developed this country historically, has become very weak... There is no leader who holds responsibility for Sinhalese," he said adding some people were trying to sabotage the convention by spreading fears of possible riots.

Participants run next to Puerto de San Lorenzo fighting bulls during the first bullrun of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain, yesterday. Two Americans and a Spaniard were hospitalised after being gored during northern Spain's Pamplona bull-running festivities, local authorities said. The bull runs are one of the most crowded events of the week-long San Fermin festival, which was immortalised in Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel "The Sun Also Rises".

PHOTO: REUTERS



Nepal calls off plans to mark Dalai Lama's birthday

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The Tibetan community in Nepal called off plans to mark the birthday of their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama after their request for a public celebration was rejected over security concerns, a government official said yesterday.

A Kathmandu official said the government refused permission for Tibetans to mark the Dalai Lama's birthday because "infiltrators" could create trouble.

The Dalai Lama turned 84 on Saturday and his followers in Nepal had hoped to celebrate the occasion in the capital, Kathmandu, but the communist government rejected their request.

China, which regards the Dalai Lama as a dangerous

Poor fight for every drop

REUTERS, New Delhi

In this teeming capital city of more than 20 million people, a worsening drought is amplifying the vast inequality between India's rich and poor.

The politicians, civil servants and corporate lobbyists who live in substantial houses and apartments in central Delhi pay very little to get limitless supplies of piped water whether for their bathrooms, kitchens or to wash the car, dog, or spray a manicured lawn. They can do all that for as little as \$10-\$15 a month.

But step into one of the slum areas in the inner city, or a giant disorganised housing estate on the outskirts and there is a daily struggle to get and pay for very limited supplies of water, which is delivered by tanker rather than pipe. And the price is soaring as supplies are fast depleting. Telecom sales representative Amar Nath Shukla, who lives in a giant unauthorised housing sprawl on the south side of Delhi, says he is now paying 700 rupees (\$10) for a small tanker to bring him, his wife and three school-age children 2,000 litres of water, their weekly quota.

A year ago, Shukla would buy two of the rusty, oval-shaped tankers a week for rupees each but he cut back to one as the price climbed 40 percent. Delhi's main

government district and the army cantonment areas get about 375 litres of water per person per day but residents of Sangam Vihar on average receive only 40 litres for each resident per day. The water comes from boreholes and tankers under the jurisdiction of the Delhi water board, run by the city government.

But residents say some of the boreholes have been taken over by private operators associated with criminal gangs and local politicians.

The water scarcity is even more acute in the Bhalswa Dairy locality of northwestern Delhi. As a result, fights frequently break out when people, mostly can-carrying women and children, sprint towards the arriving tanker. Last year, at least three people were killed in scuffles that broke out over water in Delhi. "Fights over water supplies have gone up since May

and these fights now constitute almost 50% of our daily complaints," said a police official at the Bhalswa Dairy Police station, who declined to be named.

Delhi authorities said the plan to build three dams in the upper reaches of the Yamuna river would help Delhi overcome the shortage. It will take 3-4 years to construct them, said SK Haldar, a top official of the Central Water Commission.



DROUGHT-HIT DELHI

Congress party crisis deepens with two more resignations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Two senior leaders of the Congress party resigned yesterday from their posts in the aftermath of the party's crushing defeat in parliamentary poll adding to the turmoil following the announcement of Rahul Gandhi's resignation as the party president.

Party General Secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia and Mumbai party unit chief Milind Deora, both considered Rahul loyalists, announced their resignations in separate statements.

Scindia, who himself lost the parliamentary poll in Madhya Pradesh, was given the charge of eastern part of electorally the most crucial Uttar Pradesh along with another General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. However, the Congress could win just one out of the 80 seats in the state.

Deora said he was looking forward to playing a national role to help stabilize the party but did not specify what that role is going to be.

The latest crisis in the party relates to dissonance in the party's units in Gujarat and Karnataka. The two lawmakers in Gujarat quit apparently after voting against

the Congress candidates in Rajya Sabha elections in Gujarat.

The bigger challenge for the Congress right now is to save its government in Karnataka where the resignation of the party's 13 legislators as also of three lawmakers of its ruling coalition partner Janata Dal (Secular) has put a question mark on the survival of the 13-month-old government.

If the resignations are accepted by the assembly Speaker Ramesh Kumar, the coalition will lose majority in the 224-member Assembly as its strength will come down to 104 as against the majority mark of 113.

Rahul had announced his decision to quit at a committee of the Congress Working Committee, the party's highest decision-making forum, on May 25, two days after results of the Lok Sabha elections were declared. After several weeks of impasse with the party which tried to persuade Rahul to withdraw his resignation, he tweeted an open letter, listing his reasons for resignation.

The Congress Working Committee is yet to officially accept Rahul's resignation or choose his successor.

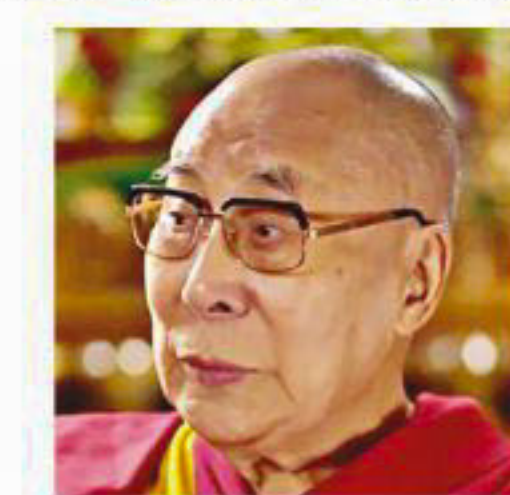


PHOTO: AFP