

NEWSIN brief

Merkel okay after third trembling spell

AFP, Berlin
German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted she was "very well", despite suffering her third trembling spell in less than a month yesterday. Merkel began shaking involuntarily as national anthems were being played at the reception of Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne. But she attended a press conference as planned just around an hour later, telling journalists that her health was no cause for concern.

Nicki Minaj pulls out of S Arabia concert

REUTERS, Los Angeles

US rapper Nicki Minaj yesterday said that she was pulling out of a planned concert in Saudi Arabia next week, citing her support for the rights of women and the LGBTQ community. Minaj, known for her raunchy outfits and provocative stage performances, was due to headline the Jeddah World Fest music festival on July 18, but her plan to appear was criticized last week on social media.

Maoists-cops battle kills 2 in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

A market gunbattle between police and Maoist rebels yesterday left two dead and highlighted a simmering showdown between Nepal's government and hard-core opponents, officials said. A police constable and a member of the banned Communist Party of Nepal died from wounds suffered in the shootout in Bhojpur district, 180 kilometres (112 miles) from Kathmandu, said Nurhari Khatiwada, the district chief officer. He told AFP the Maoists had opened fire on police patrolling the market. Police said that they have recovered a pistol and bullets from the area.



Men ride a motorcycle past debris outside a hospital damaged after a reported regime air strike in Jisr al-Shughur in the northeastern Syrian Idlib province, yesterday. The air strikes killed at least 11 civilians including 4 children in the town, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. More than 550 civilians have been killed in regime and Russian air strikes on northwest Syria since the end of April, the Observatory says.

PHOTO: AFP

POLITICAL CRISIS IN GOA

10 of 15 Congress MLAs join BJP

NDTV ONLINE

As it fights for survival in Karnataka, the Congress has imploded in neighbouring Goa. Ten out of 15 Congress lawmakers have split from the party in Goa and have merged with the ruling BJP. "10 Congress MLAs, along with their Opposition Leader, have merged with the BJP. The strength of the BJP has now risen to 27. They had come for development of the state and their constituency. They have not put forward any condition, they have joined BJP unconditionally," Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant was quoted by news agency ANI as saying. The Congress is left with only five lawmakers in the seaside state where the party had emerged the single largest party in 2017. Since two-thirds of the lawmakers have split, they do not have to quit the assembly. The Congress has been stumbling from crisis to crisis since its defeat in the national election, in which the party won just 52 seats across the country and was wiped out in 17 states. In the remaining states, the party is crumbling in slow motion.

UK to face 'consequences'

Says Rouhani after seizure of Iranian tanker; Europe urges Tehran to stick to nuke deal as Trump warns of increasing sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani yesterday warned Britain of "consequences" over the detention of an Iranian oil tanker off the coast of Gibraltar. "I point out to the British that you initiated insecurity (on the seas) and you shall grasp the consequences of it later on," Rouhani said in comments to the cabinet broadcast by state TV. Iran's president called the seizure of the tanker "a foolish act." The 330 metre (1,000 feet) Grace 1 tanker, capable of carrying two million barrels of oil, was halted last Thursday by police and customs in Gibraltar -- a tiny British overseas territory on Spain's southern tip -- with the aid of a detachment of British Royal Marines. Iran condemned the detention as an "illegal interception," but Gibraltar officials said that the cargo was believed to be destined for Syria, which is subject to European

sanctions. Iran denied this, saying that the destination "was somewhere else."

"The port named in Syria does not even have the capacity for such a supertanker to dock," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Sunday. Iran's defence minister vowed



Monday to respond to Britain's move. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump yesterday warned that sanctions against Iran would soon be "increased substantially" after Tehran said it had exceeded a limit on enriched uranium reserves under a 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by Washington.

"Iran has long been secretly 'enriching' in total violation of the terrible 150 Billion Dollar deal made by John Kerry and the Obama Administration," Trump said on Twitter. "Remember, that deal was to expire in a short number of years. Sanctions will soon be increased, substantially!"

European powers urged Iran on Tuesday to reverse Iran's move to increase uranium enrichment, as a French envoy arrived in Tehran to boost efforts to save the nuclear deal. "It must act accordingly by reversing these activities and returning to full JCPOA compliance without delay," said a statement from the European Union and foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain. Amid fraught relations between Washington and Tehran, General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told media on Tuesday that the US aims to form a coalition to guarantee freedom of navigation in strategic Gulf waters.

Qaeda chief threatens India over Kashmir

Terror group Al Qaeda's Chief, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has told "Mujahideen in Kashmir" to inflict "unrelenting blows" on the Indian Army and government in Jammu and Kashmir in a message released by the outfit's media wing, as per the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD) Long War Journal. He also brought to light Pakistan's involvement in fuelling cross-border terrorism in Kashmir in the message titled "Don't Forget Kashmir," released by As Shabab. Thomas Joscelyn, in his article for the journal, wrote that al-Qaeda has been grooming an upstart group to wage jihad against the Indian forces in Kashmir. "All the Pakistani Army and government are interested in is exploiting the mujahideen for specific political objectives, only to dump or persecute them later," Zawahiri claimed, highlighting Pakistan's role while casting them in a negative light.

Nine deer dead in Japan after eating plastic

Nine deer have died after swallowing plastic bags in Japan's Nara Park, a wildlife group said yesterday, warning that a surge in tourism may be to blame. The Nara Deer Preservation Foundation said that masses of plastic bags and snack packets were found in the stomachs of the deer which died between March and June this year. The picturesque park in Japan's ancient capital is home to more than 1,000 deer, which can even be found roaming the streets in search of special tasty crackers offered by tourists. Tourists are forbidden from feeding the deer any food besides the crackers but officials of the park said some visitors offer the animals other types of snacks. "The deer probably think that the snacks and the plastic packs covering them are both food," he said, adding the animals normally eat grass and acorns.



Afghan President Ghani calls on Taliban for peace talks

Now is the "right moment" for peace in Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani said yesterday as he once more called on the Taliban to negotiate with his government. The Taliban have steadfastly refused to discuss peace with Ghani, whom they consider a US stooge heading an illegitimate regime. But a series of talks in recent days seems to have shifted the needle in Afghanistan's war, with the US and the Taliban claiming to have made significant progress during a summit in Doha. "In the past 18 years the time was not right for peace, for a realistic peace. Today is the right moment," Ghani said at an EU anti-corruption conference being held in Kabul.

Thousands of animals saved in global crackdown: Interpol

Police across the globe have seized thousands of wild animals, including primates and big cats, and arrested nearly 600 suspects in a vast crackdown on illegal wildlife smuggling, Interpol said yesterday. Covering 109 countries, the operation was carried out in coordination with the World Customs Organization (WCO), with investigators homing in on trafficking routes and crime hotspots, the international policing body said. Dubbed Operation Thunderball, the Singapore-based investigation sought to target transnational crime networks seeking to profit from wildlife smuggling activities. It was the third such Interpol mission in recent years. Among the animals seized were 23 primates, 30 big cats, more than 4,300 birds, nearly 1,500 live reptiles and close to 10,000 turtles and tortoises, Interpol said.

Paris says its missiles found on pro-Haftar rebel base in Libya

The French government yesterday said that its missiles had been found in Libya on a base used by rebel forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar, in an embarrassing admission that raises fresh questions about its role in the conflict. Confirming a report in the New York Times, the defence ministry said in a statement that US-made Javelin missiles discovered in a camp south of Tripoli at the end of June had been purchased by France. But it denied supplying them to Haftar and breaching a UN arms embargo, saying French forces operating in the war-torn country had lost track of them after they were judged to be defective. The anti-tank missiles, worth 170,000 dollars (150,000 euros) each, were seized when forces loyal to the UN-recognised government in Tripoli overran the rebel base in Gharyan, 100 kilometres south of Tripoli.

'Worse than emergency'

Deve Gowda blasts BJP over Karnataka crisis

NDTV ONLINE

Janata Dal Secular chief Deve Gowda yesterday dubbed the Karnataka political crisis as a situation that's "worse than Emergency", and attributed the resignation of 16 legislators of the ruling coalition to the BJP's alleged eagerness to wrest power in the southern state by any means possible. "Ever since Kumaraswamy took over as chief minister with the support of the Congress, (state BJP leader) BS Yeddyurappa has been trying to get some of our MLAs to cross over. Yeddyurappa has been trying to pull off Operation Kamala since 2009. Though the BJP does not have a majority, he made 10 of our MLAs resign," Deve Gowda told NDTV, even as Congress and JDS leaders could be seen pulling out all stops to bring the rebel legislators back into the fold. The Congress and JDS have often accused the BJP of trying to poach their legislators from time to time as part of a political strategy codenamed as Operation Kamala (Operation Lotus). The BJP, however, insists that the legislators have quit their respective parties on their own accord. Deve Gowda said it was high time all opposition parties united against the BJP because the country was under "serious threat" from the BJP. "I feel that the present situation is worse than the emergency. ... I have not seen anything like this in my 60 years of political life," news agency PTI quoted him as saying before a march taken out by Congress-JDS workers towards Raj Bhavan. "All political parties should set aside their differences and come together to save democracy." The coalition government in Karnataka is teetering on the brink of collapse, with 16 Congress and JDS legislators tendering their resignations. However, Speaker KR Ramesh Kumar has rejected the BJP's appeal for an early floor test, stating that he will not rush the matter. "I have not accepted any of the resignations, and I can't do it overnight. I have given them time on the 17th. I'll go through the procedure and take a decision," he insisted.



Supporters of Karnataka Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) shout slogans as they are taken into preventive custody by the police during a demonstration staged by the parties against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its alleged horse trading, in Bangalore, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladeshi-origin workers paid least

AGENCIES

Workers of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage have the lowest median hourly pay of any ethnic group, in the latter case earning 20.1% less than white British workers, the first official statistics on the subject show. The analysis by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows significant gaps remain even when education and occupation are taken into account, particularly for those born outside the UK. London, which has the highest proportion of people classified as being in an ethnic minority group, had the largest pay gap between white and ethnic minority groups, at 21.7%. White workers did not have the highest median hourly pay, with employees of Chinese, Indian or mixed or multiple ethnicity all having higher rates, although this was not the case for Chinese or Indian workers born outside the UK. On average, the study showed, employees from the Chinese ethnic group earned 30.9% more than White British employees. The median pay of white British workers last year was £12.03 an hour compared with £9.60 for people of Bangladeshi ethnicity and £10.00 for those of Pakistani ethnicity -- groups that also had the lowest employment rates: 58.2% for Pakistanis and 54.9% for Bangladeshis.

Commenting on the article, senior ONS analyst Hugh Stickland said, "Overall, employees from certain ethnic groups such as Indian and Chinese, have higher average earnings than their White British counterparts. However, all other ethnic groups have average wages lower than for White British employees, with employees from the Bangladeshi ethnic group having the largest pay gap." People aged 16 to 30 from ethnic minority groups tended to have narrower pay gaps than older ethnic minority groups. For instance, the difference for the Bangladeshi ethnic group compared with white British workers was 3.1% among 16- to 30-year-olds but 27.9% for those over 30. The ONS said this could mean second-generation migrants were performing better than their parents in terms of pay or it could point to earnings progression varying between different ethnic groups. Women in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups were significantly less likely to be in the labour force than those in other ethnic groups. The ONS suggested this could be a result of "cultural differences" as 38.1% of women from a Bangladeshi ethnic group and 32.1% of women from a Pakistani ethnic group were found to be inactive because they were looking after their family or home.

BRITAIN'S ETHNIC PAY GAP



24 killed in PNG tribal massacre

AFP, Port Moresby

At least 24 people, including two pregnant women and their unborn children, were killed in a three-day spasm of tribal violence in Papua New Guinea's lawless highlands, prompting the prime minister yesterday to promise swift justice. Officials said the deaths occurred in Hela province -- a rugged region in the west of the country -- when rival tribes apparently clashed over control of local gold deposits in the mineral-rich soil. Highland clans have fought each other in Papua New Guinea for centuries, but an influx of automatic weapons has made clashes more deadly and escalated the cycle of violence.

'Silence is not an option'

UN rights expert urges US action over Khashoggi killing

AFP, London

The United Nations human rights expert who conducted an independent probe into the murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi on Tuesday urged the US to act on her damning findings. Agnes Callamard, a UN special rapporteur who concluded that Khashoggi's death at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October was "an extrajudicial execution" by the Gulf kingdom, criticised the United States over its inaction. "(It) has the jurisdiction or at least the interest to take action," she told a London conference hosted by human rights groups on the killing of the Saudi-born US resident. "Silence is not an option. Speaking up is required but not enough. We have to act," Callamard said. Khashoggi, a Washington Post contributor, was killed last October by Saudi agents while at Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul to obtain paperwork for his marriage. His dismembered body has not been found.

Callamard, UN rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, launched her investigation in January and last month released an 101-page report that found "credible evidence" linking Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the murder and an attempted cover up. Amid frustration at the global inaction since the publication of her findings on June 19, and Prince Salman being welcomed to a recent G20 meeting in Japan, she said the West risked a "democratic deficit" in not responding to widespread public disgust at the killing. "That is dangerous... that democratic deficit must be tackled," Callamard does not speak for the UN but reports her findings to it. She has called on Secretary General Antonio Guterres to initiate an international criminal investigation into the case. His office has said he does not have the authority to do this and a member state must initiate such action. Hatice Cengiz, Khashoggi's Turkish fiancée, appeared alongside Callamard at the London event and echoed her call for justice.

