

NEWS IN brief

Another Canada citizen detained in China

AFP, Montreal

China detained another Canadian citizen amid sour relations between the two countries, Canada's foreign ministry said on Saturday, though the reason for the jailing remains unclear. The detention follows Beijing's jailing of two Canadians, who are facing espionage charges, earlier this year after Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer for Chinese tech giant Huawei, was taken into custody in Vancouver on a warrant from the United States.

7.3 quake hits remote Maluku islands

AFP, Labuha

A major 7.3-magnitude earthquake hit the remote Maluku islands in eastern Indonesia yesterday, sending panicked residents running into the streets, but no tsunami warning was issued. The shallow quake struck about 165 kilometres (100 miles) south-southwest of the town of Ternate in North Maluku province at 6:28 pm (0928 GMT), according to the US Geological Survey. Officials were assessing the situation but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Spain rescues 141 migrants at sea

AFP, Madrid

A total of 141 migrants from the sub-Saharan region were rescued at sea Saturday between Spain and Morocco, from a variety of makeshift vessels, the Spanish maritime rescue service said. Rescuers picked up 86 people from two boats in the Alboran Sea, the stretch of the Mediterranean between the two countries. Further west, in the Straits of Gibraltar, rescue boats picked up three men in a kayak, and another 52 people -- including 14 women -- in a dinghy.



Zapata CEO Franky Zapata flies a jet-powered hoverboard or "Flyboard" during the Bastille Day military parade down the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris, yesterday. *Inset*, Outgoing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron attend the military parade. Macron yesterday sought to showcase European military cooperation during the parade at a time of growing tensions between Europe and the United States.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Navjot Sidhu resigns from Punjab govt

THE HINDU ONLINE

Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu has resigned from the Punjab cabinet amid ongoing tussle with Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.

Sidhu yesterday released a copy of his resignation on Twitter, which he said was submitted to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on June 10, 2019.

After the cabinet reshuffle on June 6, the chief minister divested Sidhu of the Local Bodies portfolio and allocated him the Power and New and Renewable Energy Sources portfolios.

However, Sidhu, instead of taking charge of the new ministry, approached party's central leadership in New Delhi to express his displeasure and appraised the "high command" of being singled out "unfairly" in the cabinet rejig on the pretext of party's "poor performance" in the urban areas of the State in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

LEAKED MEMOS OF UK'S US AMBASSADOR

Trump ditched Iran deal 'to spite Obama': report

AFP, London

Britain's ambassador to Washington believed US President Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal because it was associated with his predecessor Barack Obama, according to leaked documents published Saturday.

"The administration is set upon an act of diplomatic vandalism, seemingly for ideological and personality reasons -- it was Obama's deal," ambassador Kim Darroch wrote in a diplomatic cable in May 2018.

The cable was included in a second batch of leaked reports published by the Mail on Sunday newspaper, the first of which caused Darroch to resign earlier this week.

Separately, the Sunday Times reported that a government investigation into the leak had identified a civil servant as the person responsible.

Working with officials from the National Cyber Security Centre, part of spy agency

GCHQ, and MI6, the probe has homed in on a suspect who had access to historical Foreign Office files, the paper said.

The first leaked reports authored by Darroch were published last weekend, causing major turmoil between Britain and its closest ally. The ambassador was reported to have described the White House as "inept", prompting Trump to claim the ambassador was a "pompous fool" whom he would no longer deal with.

Darroch resigned on Wednesday, saying it was now "impossible" to do his job.

In 2015, US, China, UK, France, Russia and Germany signed a deal with Iran to limit its nuclear programme in exchange for a partial lifting of international economic sanctions. Trump withdrew US from the deal on May 8, 2018.

London's Metropolitan Police sparked widespread condemnation on Saturday after a warning to journalists that publishing leaked documents could be a criminal matter.



'Pakistan mafia' uses blackmail, threats to pressurise judiciary

Imran Khan takes a dig at ousted ex-PM; Maryam Nawaz hits back

DAWN ONLINE/ANN

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday likened Pakistani money laundering suspects to the Sicilian Mafia, saying they, like their Italian counterparts, use bribes, threats and blackmail to pressurise state institutions and the judiciary to protect their billions illegally stashed abroad.

His remark came in a tweet accompanied by a four-year-old news article about a testimony given by former Italian president Giorgio Napolitano during a trial regarding bombings carried out by mobsters in the 1990s. Napolitano was reported to have told prosecutors that the attacks were a form of "extortion or outright pressure aimed at destabilising the entire system". The bombings had allegedly led to high-ranking Italian ministers negotiating with the Sicilian Mafia to end the violence in exchange for softer jail sentences and better conditions in prison for convicted mobsters,

according to The Local's report.

"In a similar vein to the 'Sicilian mafia', the Pakistani mafia uses tactics of bribe, threat, blackmail and begging to pressurise state institutions and judiciary in order to protect their billions of money laundering stashed abroad," Imran wrote on Twitter today.

Although he did not name any

individual or political party, his observation comes a day after accountability judge Arshad Malik claimed in an affidavit that he was offered a Rs500 million cash bribe by the son of former PM Nawaz Sharif, Hussain Nawaz, who demanded that the judge resign on the grounds that

he "could no longer deal with the guilt of having convicted" Nawaz under duress in the Al-Azizia/Hill Metal Establishment reference in December 2018.

On July 6, PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz had opened a Pandora's box with a startling claim that judge Malik had "confessed" that he had been "pressurised and blackmailed" to convict her father in the Al-Azizia reference. A video containing the judge's alleged confession during his conversation with a 'sympathiser' of the PML-N, Nasir Butt, was screened at a presser. The next day, the judge had denied the allegation.

On Saturday, Maryam was quick to hit back at the prime minister. "You're a part of the mafia that pressurises judges into targeting & punishing your political opponents. It is you who used the institutions to settle scores with your opponents & defaced & malign them in the process. Shame on you," she wrote, addressing Imran.

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FLOODS IN SOUTH ASIA

Death toll rises to 50

Dozens missing, injured in Nepal; 20,000 being housed in Assam's relief camps

AGENCIES

Floods and landslides caused by torrential monsoon rains have killed at least 50 people across South Asia while dozens more are missing in Nepal, officials said yesterday.

Northeast India has also been hit by floods with 11 deaths recorded as rivers burst their banks.

At least 10 people have died and 4,889 shanty homes have been destroyed since April by monsoon rains in overcrowded Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's southeast, officials said yesterday.

In Nepal, heavy rains since Thursday have hit several districts, especially in the country's eastern region and the southern plains, affecting thousands.

Nepal police spokesman Bishwaraj Pokharel said 33 people are missing while over 1,100 people have been rescued.

"We have mobilised all resources in the country for search, rescue and relief and have been able to reach all affected areas," Pokharel told AFP.

Authorities said river levels were expected to return to normal from yesterday.

In India at least 11 people have died in the country's northeast, officials said, with some 20,000 being housed in relief camps in badly-hit Assam state.

Bangladesh's meteorological department said the Cox's Bazar district -- home to nearly one million Rohingya Muslims who have fled a military crackdown in Myanmar -- has seen at least 58.5 centimetres (nearly two feet) of rain since July 2.

'Go back' to your 'original' countries

Trump attacks Omar, Cortez

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

US President Donald Trump has said some Democrat congresswomen from countries "whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe" should "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime-infested places from which they came".

While it was not explicitly clear to whom the US president was referring, it came after he launched an extraordinary attack on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar -- both women of colour -- saying he "doesn't even know where they came from".

He tweeted: "So interesting to see 'Progressive' Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, ... now loudly and viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run.

"Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how it is done."

Commenters quickly condemned Trump's comments as racist, some accusing him of xenophobia or "early Hitler"-style talk.

Iran tanker will be freed if it doesn't head to Syria

Says UK FM as Tehran seeks to ease tensions

AFP, London

British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt sought to ease tensions with Iran on Saturday, saying a tanker held by Gibraltar would be released if Tehran guaranteed it was not heading to Syria.

He said he had a "constructive call" with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, who he said assured him that Tehran "is not seeking to escalate" tensions between the countries.

"I reassured him our concern was destination not origin of the oil on Grace One," a tanker seized off the coast of the tiny British territory of Gibraltar on July 4, Hunt tweeted.

An Iranian statement confirmed the conversation and said Hunt underlined Iran's "right to export oil". It added that Tehran hoped that an investigation in Gibraltar into the seized ship "would lead

quickly to the release of the Iranian tanker".

US officials believe the tanker was destined for Syria to deliver oil, in violation of separate EU and US sanctions.

Hunt said Britain "would facilitate release if we received guarantees that it would not be going to Syria, following due process in Gib (Gibraltar) courts.

"Was told by FM Zarif that Iran wants to resolve issue and is not seeking to escalate."

Iran, in its statement relayed by state media, said Zarif had told Hunt that his country would continue to export its oil "in all circumstances" and that the Grace One's destination was a "legal" "the eastern Mediterranean". He did not specify where.

Meanwhile, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said, "The situation is serious. The rise of tensions could lead to accidents."



Protesters attend a rally against a controversial extradition law proposal in Sha Tin district of Hong Kong, yesterday. Police and protesters clashed again in Hong Kong yesterday as unrest caused by a widely-loathed plan to allow extraditions to mainland China showed no sign of abating.

PHOTO: AFP

Storm Barry pelts Louisiana

Millions brace for flooding

AFP, Intracoastal City

Authorities warned of heavy rain and possible tornadoes throughout yesterday as major storm Barry buffeted Louisiana, though there were few indications of widespread flooding.

After briefly becoming the first hurricane of the Atlantic season, Barry was downgraded to a tropical storm after making landfall -- but it nevertheless packed a serious punch as it moved inland.

All flights in and out of the airport in the state's biggest city New Orleans were cancelled, thousands evacuated their homes, tens of thousands lost power and first responders were poised for action.

Fears that the levee system in New Orleans could be compromised eased after the Army Corps of Engineers voiced confidence that it would hold, but Mayor LaToya Cantrell urged residents not to be complacent.

"We are not in any way out of the woods," she said, adding that flash flooding could still occur.

France announces creation of a space force command

French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday announced the creation of a new national military space force command that would eventually be part of his country's air force. The declaration mirrors an initiative in the US championed by President Donald Trump. France's declared interest in boosting its military readiness in space follows increased spending and interest in the area by the United States, China and Russia. Observers see military activities -- including spy satellites, location tracing and jamming, communications and cyber attacks -- increasingly being set up in orbit around Earth. France notably has a 2019-2025 military spending plan that allocates 3.6 billion euros (\$4 billion) to defence in space.

Egypt opens two ancient pyramids, unveils new finds

Egypt on Saturday opened two ancient pyramids south of the capital Cairo and unveiled a collection of newly found sarcophagi, some containing well-preserved mummies. Antiquities Minister Khaled al-Anani told reporters the Bent Pyramid of King Sneferu, the first pharaoh of Egypt's 4th dynasty, and a nearby pyramid would be reopened to visitors for the first time since 1965. He also said a team of archaeologists had uncovered sarcophagi and the remains of an ancient wall dating back to the Middle Kingdom some 4,000 years ago. The finds also included funerary masks as well as tools. Egypt has in recent years sought to promote archaeological discoveries across the country in a bid to revive tourism.



Power back in Manhattan after huge power outage

A power outage that gripped New York's Manhattan ended on Saturday after it plunged Broadway theaters into darkness, brought subways to a halt and flicked off billboards in Times Square. About 42,000 customers lost electricity in the early evening, according to power utility Con Edison. The power returned around 10:00 pm (0200 GMT), accompanied by applause that could be heard throughout the formerly darkened streets. Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Twitter that the outage was caused by a "manhole fire," but later told CNN it was under investigation. The blackout disrupted services including transportation across the United States's most-populous city.

SOURCE: AFP