

NEWS IN brief

Turkish diplomat, 2 others killed in Iraq

At least one gunman killed three people including the Turkish vice consul to Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region in an attack yesterday in the regional capital of Arbil, a police source told AFP. "Three people, including the Turkish vice consul, were killed in an armed attack targeting the consul and the consulate's employees in a restaurant in Arbil," the source said, adding the attackers had fled the scene. Turkey confirmed that an "employee" at its Arbil consulate was killed in a shooting. The attack was not immediately claimed.

Iran says assisting 'foreign tanker'

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said Tuesday that the Islamic republic was assisting a "foreign tanker that had encountered a technical problem" in the Gulf after receiving a distress call. "According to international regulations... Iranian forces approached it and using a tugboat brought it into Iranian waters for necessary repairs," Abbas Mousavi said according to an official government Twitter account. The spokesman added that further details would be released later.

Explosion in south Syria kills 6 soldiers

A blast killed six soldiers in southern Syria yesterday in a rare such deadly attack in the defeated cradle of the eight-year uprising, a war monitor said. "The explosive device was aimed at a convoy transporting members of the Fourth Division" in the southern province of Daraa, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Fifteen others were also wounded in the attack near Yadud village, some seven kilometres (four miles) outside the provincial capital of Daraa city, the Britain-based monitor said.



A Palestinian demonstrator kicks a tear gas canister fired by Israeli forces during a protest over the death of a Palestinian prisoner in an Israeli jail, near the Jewish settlement of Beit El, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

New govt within five months

Says Lankan president

THE ISLAND/ANN

Sri Lankans would have the opportunity to appoint a new government within five months and they should ensure that a government of humane, patriotic and clean politicians would be elected, President Maithripala Sirisena said on Tuesday at Nuwara Eliya.



Speaking at a ceremony to mark the opening of the Nuwara Eliya new hospital, he said that the only way that Sri Lanka could realise its potential was to elect a clean government. "The economy has collapsed. The only way out it to elect a government comprising clean politicians. The responsibility for electing clean leaders lies with the voters."

The President said that clean and patriotic politicians would attempt to identify the problems faced by the people and try to solve them. "If the public sector workers numbering 1.6 million do their work properly, developing the country will not be a problem."

"Drugs destroy a country. This is a menace and it's difficult to get things done because a lot of politicians only think about their own political agendas."

The President also said that a lot of steps had been taken to uplift the living standards of the estate sector workers during the last four years.

Sirisena on Monday claimed international drug syndicates orchestrated Sri Lanka's deadly Easter Sunday bombings, despite earlier blaming the attacks on Islamists.

The statement comes amid a nationwide narcotics crackdown, with Sirisena aiming to reintroduce capital punishment for drug offences.

Suu Kyi's reform bid draws ire

Thousands of people both for and against proposed amendments demonstrate as calls for military to loosen grip on politics grow

REUTERS, Yangon

Thousands of people yesterday demonstrated on the streets of Myanmar's largest city, Yangon, both for and against proposed constitutional amendments that would reduce the power of the military.

Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party is pushing for change despite objections from military lawmakers, who hold a veto over amendments.

In the morning, hundreds of demonstrators, led by activists not aligned to the party, gathered at the central Sule Pagoda wearing red headbands printed with the words "Amend the 2008 Constitution".

"The current government is trying to move forward, but they can't because of the 2008 constitution," said protest organiser Pyae Phyoo Zaw, who also called for elected leaders to be given oversight of the security forces.

Protesters also called for the military to loosen its grip on politics. Under the constitution drafted by

the former junta, the military chief nominates a quarter of lawmakers and the ministers of defence, home affairs and border affairs.

It also blocks Suu Kyi from becoming president, with a prohibition on presidential candidates with foreign spouses or children. Suu Kyi had two



sons with her late husband, Michael Aris, a British academic.

Several thousand people marched to the Sule Pagoda yesterday afternoon in a separate protest, a flyer for which called on "those who love their race and religion" to turn out against

constitutional reform.

A nationalist movement led by Buddhist monks is critical of Suu Kyi and casts the military as protector of the Buddhist-majority nation.

The demonstrators yesterday held banners calling for the charter's restrictions on presidential candidates and on constitutional amendments to be preserved.

"Our race and religion will be lost without a shot being fired if people of different religions can take the president's position," said one protester, Shwe Yamin.

A report containing thousands of amendments proposed by various political parties was submitted on Monday for debate at the parliament in the capital, Naypyitaw, but has not been made public.

Nay Phone Latt, an NLD lawmaker in Yangon's regional parliament, told Reuters one of the party's key proposals was to set a timeline for the gradual reduction of military seats in parliament, beginning with a move from 25% to 15% in 2021.

BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS

Moratorium expected to be lifted in a month or two

Says Malaysia's human resources minister

THE STAR ONLINE

The moratorium on migrant workers from Bangladesh is expected to be lifted next month the soonest, says Malaysia's Human Resources Minister M Kulasegaran.

"I hope we can conclude within one or two months of the review on the moratorium that is now in the final stage, so that labour supply from Bangladesh can resume," he said at a press conference after officiating the opening of the 9th International Planters Conference here on Monday.

The suspension of workers from Bangladesh had affected several major industries in the country, especially the plantation and construction sectors, and the lifting of the moratorium is expected to ease labour woes in these sectors.

On Sept 1, 2018 Putrajaya suspended the Foreign Worker Application System (SPPA) for Bangladeshi workers, which only allowed the recruitment process to be carried out by 10 selected agencies

approved by the previous government.

The previous system saw Bangladeshi workers having to fork out up to RM20,000 in processing fees per person to agents to facilitate work permit approvals and other arrangements.

Last week, Bangladesh's Minister of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Imran Ahmad, who was in Kuala Lumpur, said Bangladesh expects to reach an agreement with Malaysia on a new recruitment mechanism next month.

Imran also assured that the new mechanism and process for the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers for employment in Malaysia would be a transparent one.

"It is a matter of time to make this system right. The old system is not working, so for the new system, we will get everybody involved and work on it. I think in August, there could be a solution," he said.

Imran estimated some 400,000 Bangladeshi workers were currently working legally in Malaysia.

'You must be stupid'

Duterte says he won't be tried by int'l court for mass killings in his war on drugs

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has declared he will never be tried by an international court for mass killings in his war on drugs, and vowed no let-up in a crackdown that he said he was winning and would see through "to the very end".

In a television interview with a celebrity pastor, the firebrand leader said the Philippine justice system was working fine, so it would be "stupid" to imagine he would let an international court put him on trial.

"I will only face, be tried or face a trial, in a Philippine court. Presided by a Filipino judge."

Prosecuted by a Filipino... I will not answer a Caucasian, asking questions, white man there. You must be stupid," he said late on Tuesday.

"I am a Filipino. We have our courts here... Shit. You have to bring me somewhere else? I would not like that. I have my country. It's working. I know it's

working. Justice is working here."

His opponents argue otherwise and say police are killing with impunity, and that with an approval rating of about 80 percent, a super-majority in Congress and presidential appointees heading courts, commissions and investigative bodies, there is little chance of Duterte being impeached or prosecuted at home.

Duterte, 74, has previously said he was so committed to his war on drugs that he was prepared to be tried for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, or rot in jail there.

However, within weeks of an ICC prosecutor announcing in February 2018 that a preliminary examination was being conducted into the killings, Duterte ordered police not to cooperate, and then unilaterally cancelled the Philippines' ICC membership. The ICC examination continues, despite his withdrawal.



People participate in a demonstration to protest proposed amendments to the 2008 Myanmar Constitution in Yangon yesterday.

MUMBAI ATTACKS

Pakistan again arrests alleged mastermind

Trump hails the move

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani authorities yesterday detained the alleged mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, a security official said, as the country faces increased pressure to crack down on militants operating on its soil.

Firebrand cleric Hafiz Saeed -- declared a global terrorist by the US and UN, and who has a \$10 million US bounty on his head -- was taken into custody following a raid by counter-terrorism forces in the eastern city of Gujranwala.

"Hafiz Saeed was going to Gujranwala to apply for bail in another case when he was arrested," said a security official with knowledge of the arrest, who requested anonymity.

US President Donald



No respite as rains pound S Asia

Death toll passes 200; hundreds of thousands displaced

AFP, New Delhi

Heavy monsoon rains across South Asia claimed more lives yesterday, with the death toll passing 200 as authorities tried to reach stranded villagers cut off by surging floodwaters.

The annual deluge is crucial to replenishing water supplies in the impoverished region, but the rains from June to September often turn deadly.

Across India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, millions of residents have been affected and hundreds of thousands displaced, with homes and boats washed away.

In flood-prone Bangladesh, which is criss-crossed by rivers, around one-third of the country is underwater and people were being killed by lightning strikes, officials said.

In India, the death toll rose to at least 120 and entire communities were cut off by rising floodwaters



which damaged or submerged roads.

"It's been 15 days (since) this area has been flooded," a local resident in Assam, where the death toll reached 22, told AFP.

"The damage it has caused is very bad. Cattle have also been affected. Everything has been destroyed."

Video footage shared on social media showed rescuers pulling a rhinoceros calf from swollen

floodwaters at the state's World Heritage-listed Kaziranga National Park, which is home to two-thirds of the world's remaining one-horned rhinos.

In Bihar, which borders Nepal -- and like Assam is one of the worst-affected regions in India -- locals told AFP they were unable to reach food supplies.

Some 33 deaths have been reported and 2.5 million residents

affected. Locals were erecting makeshift shelters on elevated land with the meagre belongings they had salvaged from the floodwaters.

In Mumbai, the number of victims from a building collapse following heavy rains rose to 13.

In the worst-affected Bangladesh district of Kurigram, deputy district administrator Hafizur Rahman told AFP a woman and four children died after their small boat sank in floodwaters.

Others were killed by landslides in Cox's Bazar district -- home to nearly one million Rohingya Muslim refugees.

In Nepal, the aid agency Save the Children said severe flooding and landslides had left tens of thousands of people homeless, with many stranded outdoors or marooned.

At least 78 people have died and 16,000 families have been displaced.

AFGHAN PROVINCE

Taliban shut dozens of health clinics

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban have shut down dozens of health facilities run by a Swedish aid group in a move affecting thousands of people, especially women and children, the agency said yesterday.

Doctors and hospitals have been frequently targeted by both sides during the country's decades-long conflict, and this latest loss follows a raid by Afghan security forces on a clinic last week that left four people dead.

The closures have hit Wardak province west of Kabul, where the Taliban have shuttered 42 of the 77 health facilities being run by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, the aid group said in a statement.

"Due to this closure, an estimated number of over 5,700 patients are affected on a daily basis," it said.

Denying people medical treatment and health services in this way "is an obvious violation of human rights and international humanitarian law", SCA's country director Sonny Mansson said.

"We demand immediate reopening of all health facilities for the people and we strongly urge all parties involved in conflict to refrain from such actions which deliberately put civilian lives at risk."

The Taliban have not issued any statement, but the militants have previously closed down health clinics and banned polio vaccination campaigns in areas under their control.



Trump hailed his arrest on Twitter.

A spokesman for Saeed's group, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a wing of the militant organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), confirmed the arrest to AFP, but gave no further details.

Another security official said the arrest relates to terror financing charges.

Saeed has spent years rotating in and out of varying forms of detention, sometimes briefly arrested then released again by authorities.

But for the most part he has been free to move at will around Pakistan, enraging India which has repeatedly called for his prosecution.