

NEWSIN brief

Internet shut down continues in Rakhine

AFP, Yangon

A sweeping internet shutdown in Myanmar's conflict-hit Rakhine state went into its fifth week yesterday as residents called on the government to end an information blackout that rights groups say could provide cover for rights abuses. Mobile phone operators suspended internet data on June 21 in eight townships across northern Rakhine and one in neighbouring Chin state -- where soldiers are fighting ethnic Rakhine rebels known as the Arakan Army (AA) who want greater autonomy.

UN nuke watchdog chief Amano dies



AFP, Vienna

The head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, Yukiya Amano, has died after suffering poor health for some time, the International Atomic Energy Agency said yesterday, as international tensions run high over Iran's nuclear activities. The longtime Japanese diplomat, who was 72, held the IAEA's top job since December 2009.

France finds wreckage of submarine in Med

AFP, Marseille

A French submarine that went missing in the western Mediterranean in 1968 has been located during a search mission, officials said yesterday, ending a 51-year wait for families of the deceased who continue to seek answers to the naval disaster. "It's a success, a relief and a technical feat," Defence Minister Florence Parly wrote on Twitter, after the wreck was discovered 45 kilometres off the southern French port of Toulon.

Uyghurs didn't choose to be Muslim: China

CNN ONLINE

China has delved back centuries in an attempt to justify its controversial policies in the far-western region of Xinjiang, where experts say up to 2 million Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities have been held against their will in vast detention centers. In a white paper released Sunday, the Chinese State Council Information Office painted Xinjiang as a religiously diverse community where a number of faiths had co-existed for centuries. The 6,800-word document, released in full by state news agency Xinhua, said that Xinjiang "respects citizens' freedom to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion." However, it also said Islam was introduced to



region by force during a religious war in the 10th century, which ended Buddhism's centuries of dominance. "The Uyghur conversion to Islam was not a voluntary choice made by the common people, but a result of religious wars and imposition by the ruling class," the report said. "Islam is neither an indigenous nor the sole belief system of the Uyghur people," it added. China is officially an atheist country, although around 18% of the country's citizens identify as Buddhist, 5% Christians and under 2% Muslim, according to the CIA Factbook.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

A van is covered by paints as it sits in front of the barricades after clashes between protesters and police following a march against a controversial extradition bill in Hong Kong early yesterday. Inset, men in white T-shirts with sticks are seen in Yuen Long after attacking anti-extradition bill demonstrators at a train station in Hong Kong.



Anger soars over HK mob attack Police face criticism as 45 protesters injured

AFP, Hong Kong

Anger soared in Hong Kong yesterday over a vicious assault on pro-democracy protesters by suspected triad gangsters that left dozens wounded, a dramatic escalation of the political turmoil plaguing the Chinese city. The financial hub's roiling unrest took a dark turn late Sunday when gangs of men -- most wearing white T-shirts and carrying bats, sticks and metal poles -- set upon anti-government demonstrators as they returned from another huge march earlier that day. Footage broadcast live on Facebook showed people screaming as the men beat multiple protesters and journalists in Yuen Long station and inside subway trains, leaving pools of blood on the floor. Hospital authorities said 45 people were wounded in the attack, with one man in critical condition and five others with serious injuries. Critics rounded on the city's embattled police force, accusing officers of taking more than an hour to reach the site and failing to arrest the armed assailants who stayed in the streets around the station into yesterday morning. Some men in white shirts were later filmed leaving the scene in cars with Chinese mainland number plates. China yesterday reacted furiously to anti-government protesters vandalising the walls of its representative's office in Hong Kong and defacing the national emblem, branding their actions "absolutely intolerable." Taiwan's foreign minister yesterday called for "genuine" democratic elections to be held in Hong Kong after the city was rocked by violence, comments that infuriated Beijing.

A 'dangerous plot' Iran's supreme leader slams US plan for ME peace; Israel demolishes Palestinian homes in Jerusalem

AGENCIES

Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that a US plan to end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians through development fuelled by international investment was a "dangerous plot" to destroy Palestinian identity with money. "This dangerous plot aims to eliminate Palestinian identity among the Palestinian people ... This is the main point that one should resist, and not allow them to eliminate the Palestinian identity using money," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said during a meeting with a senior Hamas delegation.

Khamenei praised the Hamas terrorist group and the "resistance of the Palestinian people" during the meeting, saying, "victory will not be achieved without resistance and struggle," according to a press release on Khamenei's website. He added that the Palestinian cause is the "first and most important issue" in the Islamic world, reported The Jerusalem Post.

The Iranian leader expressed appreciation of the "good and important" position of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, saying, "Hamas is at the heart of the Palestinian movement, as Palestine is at the heart of the movement

of the Islamic world."

"We have always stated our views on Palestine explicitly and clearly, and even in the international arena of our friends... they know that the Islamic republic is quite serious in the Palestinian affair," Khamenei noted.

Khamenei stressed that if the Islamic world had been united on the Palestinian issue, "it would now be better off." He attacked Saudi Arabia for its "stupidity" in following the US, because supporting the Palestinians could have "won them points" against America.

Meanwhile, Israel demolished a number of Palestinian homes it considers illegal south of Jerusalem early yesterday, in a move which has drawn international concern.

The Palestinians immediately slammed the demolitions in the Sur Baher area which straddles the West Bank and Jerusalem, but Israel defended the move as essential to its security.

Before dawn, hundreds of Israeli police and soldiers sealed off buildings in the area close to the Israeli security barrier which cuts off the occupied West Bank, an AFP journalist said.

The European Union yesterday urged Israel to immediately halt the razing of Palestinian homes, saying it undermined hope for a lasting peace in the region.

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Death toll in S Asia floods jumps to 650

AFP, New Delhi

Severe floods and lightning have claimed the lives of more than 650 people across India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, officials said yesterday as the annual monsoon took its toll on the rain-fed region.

More than 10 million people in the South Asian countries have been affected by the deluge, which has also forced tens of thousands to flee their homes.

In India, heavy rains since the start of July have killed at least 467 people with many districts in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam states cut off because of flooding.

In Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, lightning strikes killed 37 people in separate incidents. The latest fatalities took the northern state's toll to 228 dead.

Eight children playing in the open in Bihar's Nawada district were also killed by lightning on Friday, taking the toll in the state to more than 100. In Assam, 67 people have perished but the situation was likely to improve with no heavy rains predicted in the coming days.

More than 70 people have also died in building collapses in Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states following substantial rainfalls. In Nepal, 90 people have died and another 29 are missing.

Torrential rains in Bangladesh have killed more than 97 people in the last two weeks, with swathes of agricultural fields lying inundated. At least 30 people have also lost their lives in Pakistan.



Nurses at the Medina Hospital assist a civilian wounded in an explosion outside a hotel near the international airport in Mogadishu, Somalia yesterday. At least 17 people were killed and 28 wounded when the car bomb was detonated outside the hotel, a security officer and witnesses said. Al-Shabaab militants claimed responsibility for the bombing.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BREXIT TURBULENCE UK minister quits before Johnson becomes PM

AFP, London

Britain's leadership contest entered its finale yesterday with the favourite Boris Johnson facing more defections from ministers over his Brexit plan.

The month-long contest between former London mayor Johnson and Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt is being decided by fewer than 200,000 grassroots members of the governing Conservative Party.

The winner will have three months to resolve a three-year Brexit crisis that could damage economies on both sides of the Channel and determine the fate of generations of Britons.

The voting window shuts at 5 pm (1600 GMT). The new party leader will be announced on today and take over as prime minister tomorrow.

Both candidates have had a rocky end to a campaign whose closing stages are being waged against a backdrop of a high-stakes

standoff with Iran in the Gulf.

Finance Secretary Philip Hammond announced Sunday that he would make a point of resigning before Johnson becomes prime minister because of his threat to take Britain out of the EU by an October 31 deadline without a deal.

Pro-EU Foreign Office minister Alan Duncan announced yesterday that he was also quitting "in anticipation of the change on Wednesday".

"It is tragic that just when we could have been the dominant intellectual and political force throughout Europe, and beyond, we have to spend every day working beneath the dark cloud of Brexit," he wrote in his resignation letter to outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May.

London newspapers were filled with speculation that at least a half-dozen lower-ranking ministers may also jump ship over the coming days.



India launches 2nd moon mission Hopes to probe lunar south pole

REUTERS, Sriharikota

India yesterday launched a rocket into space in an attempt to safely land a rover on the moon, its most ambitious mission yet in the effort to establish itself as a low-cost space power.

If successful, the \$146 million mission will allow Indian scientists to carry out studies on the presence of water at the moon's south pole, unexplored by any other nation before.

"This mission will offer new knowledge about the Moon," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, praising the scientists responsible for what he called a fully indigenous mission.

China, Russia and the United States are the only other nations to have sent missions to the moon.

A live broadcast showed images of the rocket, carrying the unmanned Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft, blasting off from a space centre in southern India as thousands of onlookers cheered the launch, which was delayed for a week by a technical snag.

The boosters separated safely as the craft began its nearly 50-day journey, after which the lander will attempt a controlled landing to deploy a rover at the moon's south pole.

The spacecraft has successfully entered the earth's orbit, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said.

The next month and a half will see the spacecraft perform crucial maneuvers to ensure a smooth landing, ISRO Chairman K. Sivan said, as the agency's officials congratulated each other with handshakes and bear hugs after the launch.

NZ tightens gun laws again after mosque attack

New Zealand yesterday announced plans for a national firearms register in its second round of gun law reforms following the Christchurch mosque attacks which killed 51 Muslim worshippers. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said regulations around who could hold firearm licences would also be tightened to "stop weapons falling into the wrong hands". Ardern said the March 15 killings, when a gunman opened fire at two Christchurch mosques as worshippers gathered for Friday prayers, had changed attitudes towards gun ownership in New Zealand. "There is a new normal around firearms, it is a change of mindset," she told reporters. "The most dangerous weapons are being taken out of circulation."

N Korea leader voted in polls with 99.98% turnout: KCNA

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un voted in nationwide local elections on Sunday that registered the near 100 percent turnout claimed for every ballot held in the nuclear-armed state. Given the absence of any competition among candidates, elections in the North are essentially a political ritual which, observers say, allows the authorities to claim a popular mandate while reinforcing loyalty to Kim's regime. The 99.98 percent turnout this year was a 0.01 percent improvement on the figures registered in 2015. Only those overseas "on foreign tour or working in oceans" were unable to vote, the North's state-run agency KCNA reported Sunday, adding that even "voters troubled with aging or illness cast their ballots into mobile ballot boxes".

US to press Pak PM on Afghan peace, terrorism crackdown



US President Donald Trump is likely to press Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan for help on ending the war in Afghanistan and fighting militants when the two leaders were set to meet at the White House yesterday amid their countries' strained relations. Last year, Trump cut off hundreds of millions of dollars in security assistance to Pakistan, accusing Islamabad of offering "nothing but lies and deceit" while giving safe haven to terrorists, a charge angrily rejected by Islamabad. Khan, who arrived in Washington on Saturday, is expected to try to mend fences and attract much-needed US investment, hoping the arrest last week of a militant leader with a \$10 million US bounty on his head will lead to a warmer reception. SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS