

Iran to meet nuke deal parties on Sunday

AFP, Tehran

Iran said it will attend a meeting in Vienna on Sunday of diplomats from countries still party to the 2015 nuclear deal, as they try to salvage the landmark agreement. The meeting would be held at the level of deputy ministers and political directors, it said in an English-language statement. It was requested by the European parties to discuss the "new situation", the statement added, referring to Iran's reduced nuclear commitments under the deal in response to the US withdrawal.

Former Chinese PM Li Peng dies at 90

AFP, Beijing

Former Chinese premier Li Peng -- known as the "Butcher of Beijing" for his role in the Tiananmen Square crackdown -- has died aged 90, state broadcaster Xinhua said yesterday. The former chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee died of an unspecified illness in Beijing on Monday, Xinhua said. The ex-premier had previously battled bladder cancer.

Massive power cut hits Venezuela

AFP, Caracas

Caracas and other parts of crisis-wracked Venezuela were hit by a massive power cut on Monday that the government blamed on an "electromagnetic attack" on Guayana power station. The lights went out in most of Caracas at 4:41 pm while people in other parts of the country took to social media to report their own power outages. Guayana is southern Venezuela is home to the Guri hydroelectric power station that produces 80 percent of the country's electricity.



This picture taken on Monday, shows the demolition of a Palestinian building which was under construction, in the Palestinian village of Sur Baher in East Jerusalem.

PHOTO: AFP

PALESTINIAN HOME DEMOLITIONS

Israeli acts amount to 'war crime'

AGENCIES

Amnesty International yesterday slammed Israeli authorities for the mass demolition of Palestinian homes in Sur Baher, and urged the international community to take action.

Israeli forces carried out a longstanding military-issued demolition order on Monday morning, targeting a number of buildings in the community that lies in both the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Dozens of residential apartments were destroyed, reported Middle East Monitor.

In its statement, the global human rights organisation pulled punches in condemning the home demolitions.

"These demolitions are a flagrant violation of international law and part of a systematic pattern by the Israeli authorities' to forcibly displace Palestinians in the occupied territories," said Saleh Higazi, deputy Middle East and North Africa director for Amnesty International.

"Such actions amount to war crimes," the Amnesty official added.

Palestinian, UN officials and the European Union condemned the demolitions and called for an immediate halt to the policy.

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

Residents and activists were dragged out of homes, though most of the buildings under demolition orders -- a total of 10 -- were still under construction.

SAFE SHIPPING IN GULF

UK plans Europe-led force

Trump blasts Tehran, says hard to deal with top 'terror' state

AGENCIES

Britain called for a European-led naval mission to ensure safe shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, days after Iran seized a British-flagged tanker in what London described as an act of "state piracy" in the strategic waterway.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt outlined the plans to parliament on Monday after a meeting of COBR, the government's emergency committee, which discussed London's response to Friday's capture of the Stena Impero tanker by Iranian commandos at sea.

"Under international law, Iran had no right to obstruct the ship's passage - let alone board her. It was therefore an act of state piracy," Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt told parliament.

"We will now seek to put together a European-led maritime protection mission to support safe passage of both crew and cargo in this vital

region," Hunt said.

The proposed new maritime protection mission "will not be part of the US maximum pressure policy on Iran because we remain committed to preserving the Iran nuclear

Mission 'not part of US maximum pressure policy': Jeremy Hunt  
US sanctions Chinese oil trader over alleged Iran violations

agreement", he said.

The British announcement signals a potential shift from Washington's major European allies who so far have been cool to US requests that they beef up their military presence in the Gulf, for fear of feeding the confrontation there, reported Reuters.

It is unclear how much influence Britain may have in Europe given it is

about to have a new prime minister, widely expected to be Boris Johnson, who takes over a country divided over Brexit, its planned departure from the European Union.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said on Monday that chances of negotiating with Iran were dwindling and blasted the Islamic republic as the world's top "state of terror."

The president cited a series of recent conflicts involving Tehran, including the downing of US and Iranian drones and, most recently, Tehran's announcement that it arrested 17 people in connection to a CIA spy ring, a claim Trump rejected as "lies."

China yesterday called US sanctions against Chinese companies "illegal", a day after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced he was putting a leading oil importer on a blacklist, reported AFP.

Pak intelligence led CIA to bin Laden: Imran Khan

AFP, Washington

Pakistan's main spy agency provided the US with a lead that helped them find and kill al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, Prime Minister Imran Khan said Monday.

Pakistan has until now officially denied having any knowledge of the terror chief until he was shot dead in a night time raid by US special forces on May 2, 2011, an incident that was a major national embarrassment and caused ties between the two countries to plummet.

Khan, who is visiting Washington on his first official trip, made his claim in an interview with Fox News when he was asked whether his country would release a jailed doctor whose fake immunization drive helped the US track and kill bin Laden in 2011.

"This is a very emotive issue, because Shakeel Afridi in Pakistan is considered a spy," he told host Bret Baier, referring to the doctor.

"We in Pakistan always felt that we were an ally of the US and if we had been given the information about Osama bin Laden,

we should have taken him out."

Baier then asked if Khan understood the skepticism around the Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI) for leaking key information, to which Khan replied:

"And yet it was ISI that gave the information which led to the location of Osama bin Laden. If you ask CIA it was ISI which gave the initial location through the phone connection."

It was not immediately clear what Khan was referring to and he did not provide more detail.

Though Pakistan officially denies knowing that bin Laden was living on its territory, Asad Durrani, a former spymaster, told Al Jazeera in 2015 that the ISI probably knew where he was hiding and hoped to use him as a bargaining chip before he was killed.

The 9/11 mastermind was tracked down after a 10-year manhunt to Abbottabad, a garrison town north of Islamabad where Pakistan's military academy is headquartered, sparking allegations authorities were colluding with the terror group.



PUBLICATION OF ASSAM NRC LIST

India's SC extends deadline to Aug 31

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday gave authorities in a northeastern state an extra month to complete a citizenship list to identify illegal immigrants in an exercise that has stoked concern for millions of people, most of them Muslim.

Residents of state of Assam, which borders Bangladesh, have to produce documents proving that they or their families lived in the country before March 24, 1971 - the year that hundreds of thousands of people fled Bangladesh during its India-backed war of independence from Pakistan.

"We extend the deadline for final publication of National Register for Citizens in Assam from July 31 to August 31," Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said, adding that floods in Assam made work on the list difficult.

Millions of people have been displaced by the floods after torrential rains battered the region.

Work on the Supreme Court-ordered citizenship register has been going on since 2015 and a draft list published last year excluded more than four million of the state's residents, triggering widespread fears of deportation and jail.

Critics accuse Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist-led government of using the citizenship exercise to further marginalise minority Muslims and bolster its support in the majority Hindu community.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party denies any bias but says it is opposed to the appeasement of any community.

Last week, the Modi government sought more time to compile the final list, saying thousands of people had produced fake documents to try to become Indian citizens.



Leadership contender Jeremy Hunt (L) shakes hands to congratulate new Conservative Party leader and incoming prime minister Boris Johnson as the results of the leadership contest are announced at an event in central London, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Australia to bar return of citizens who fought for IS

Australia is poised to bar its citizens who have fought for the Islamic State militant group from returning home for up to two years, under new laws discussed in parliament Tuesday. The controversial legislation would give headline Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton the ability to invoke "exclusion orders" to prevent suspected terrorists from returning to the country. It is based on similar legislation introduced in the United Kingdom, where a judge is tasked with deciding whether to impose an exclusion order. Dutton told parliament in early July the bill targets 230 Australians who travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for Islamic State, 80 of whom he said were still in active conflict zones.

US cops fired for suggesting Ocasio-Cortez be shot

Two Louisiana policemen were fired Monday over an incendiary Facebook post suggesting a liberal congresswoman should be shot, as President Donald Trump's tweets attacking Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other lawmakers sparked a national uproar. "This vile idiot needs a round.....and I don't mean the kind she used to serve," Charlie Rispoli, of the Gretna police department, wrote of former bartender Ocasio-Cortez. He was writing in response to a news article published by a self-styled "satirical" website which falsely claimed the lawmaker had said American soldiers were paid too much. Following an investigation, Gretna police chief Arthur Lawson fired Rispoli -- as well as fellow officer Angelo Varisco, who "liked" Rispoli's post.

Maria Ressa's libel trial opens in Philippines



High-profile Philippine journalist Maria Ressa's libel trial opened yesterday in a case that she and press freedom advocates see as government retaliation for her news site's critical reporting on President Rodrigo Duterte. Ressa, who leads online outlet Rappler and was named a Time Magazine "Person of the Year" in 2018 for her journalism, is out on bail and faces years in prison if convicted under the criminal cyber-libel law. The news portal has written extensively and often critically on Duterte's policies, including his deadly drugs war that rights groups say may be a crime against humanity. Besides the libel case, Ressa and Rappler have been hit with 10 other criminal charges over the past year. yesterday's brief hearing ended after testimony from one minor witness, with the case set to resume on July 30.

SOURCE: AFP

CONTROVERSIAL TRUMP COMMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN WAR AND PEACE

Angry Kabul seeks clarification

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan yesterday called for an explanation of comments by US President Donald Trump in which he said he could win the Afghan war in just 10 days by wiping out Afghanistan but did not want to kill 10 million people.

Trump's remarks followed a meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan at the White House on Monday at which Trump voiced optimism that Pakistan could help broker a political settlement to end the nearly 18-year-old war in Afghanistan.

The remarks drew a stiff response from Afghanistan's presidential palace, which has been excluded from talks between the United States and the Taliban and which accuses Pakistan of supporting the insurgency.

"The Afghan nation has not and will never allow any foreign power to determine its fate," the presidential

palace said.

"While the Afghan government supports the US efforts for ensuring peace in Afghanistan, the government underscores that foreign heads of state cannot determine Afghanistan's fate in absence of the Afghan leadership," it said in a statement.



It called for clarification of Trump's statement.

In his comments in Washington, Trump said Pakistan was helping the United States "extricate" itself from Afghanistan, where the United States was acting as a "policeman" rather than fighting a war.

"If we wanted to fight a war in Afghanistan and win it, I could win that war in a week. I just don't want to kill 10 million people," Trump told reporters at the White House where he was hosting Khan.

"I have plans on Afghanistan that, if I wanted to win that war, Afghanistan would be wiped off the face of the Earth. It would be gone," he said.

"It would be over in -- literally, in 10 days. And I don't want to do -- I don't want to go that route."

Senior Afghan politicians largely refrained from comment, but commentators on social media were infuriated.

"Your insulting message to (Afghanistan) is either accept the (Pakistani) proposal for peace or eventually you may have to use nukes," former intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil wrote on Twitter.

"The statement was embarrassing and an insult to all Afghans," said Shakib Noori, an entrepreneur based in Kabul, the capital.