

NEWS IN brief

Death toll rises to 24 in China landslide

AFP, Beijing

The death toll in a landslide that buried a village in southwest China rose to 26 yesterday following the discovery of two more bodies, state media said. Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said 25 people were still missing three days after the disaster which struck in Shuicheng county, Guizhou province. Two children and a mother with a baby -- who were unearthed on Thursday -- were among the dead, according to official news outlets.

At least four dead in Los Angeles shooting

REUTERS, Washington

Four people were shot dead and two wounded on Thursday in a shooting spree that spread across four Los Angeles neighbourhoods and touched off a 12-hour manhunt before police tackled and arrested an armed suspect. Police identified the suspect as Gerry Zaragoza, 26, and said he was held on pending murder charges in the shooting deaths of his father and brother, and the wounding of his mother with a gun shot.

16 Marines arrested for human smuggling

AFP, Washington

The US military said on Thursday it had arrested 16 Marines on human trafficking and drug-related charges. The group was taken into custody during a battalion formation at Camp Pendleton, a major Marine base in California about 65 miles north of the Mexican border. Similar instances of US military members helping migrants enter the US were reported in 2014, 2017 and last year. The military said the Marines arrested Thursday were not part of the military deployment ordered to the US-Mexico border.



Demonstrators hold banners during a protest against the recent violence at the arrivals hall of the international airport in Hong Kong, yesterday. Hundreds of protesters, including flight attendants, held a rally in the airport's arrival hall in a bid to "educate" visitors about the unprecedented demonstrations recently taking place in the international finance hub.

PHOTO: AFP



REGIME, RUSSIAN AIR STRIKES IN SYRIA

103 civilians killed in 10 days

Says UN, more than 400,000 displaced in 3 months

AGENCIES

Air strikes by the Syrian government and its allies on schools, hospitals, markets and bakeries have killed at least 103 civilians in the past 10 days, including 26 children, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said in a statement yesterday.

"These are civilian objects, and it seems highly unlikely, given the persistent pattern of such attacks, that they are all being hit by accident," Bachelet said, adding that the rising toll had been met with "apparent international indifference".

Besides the killings, more than 400,000 people were displaced in northwestern Syria over the past three months, she added.

The jihadist-dominated Idlib region is supposed to be protected by a months-old international truce deal, but has faced growing bombardment by the government and its ally Russia since late April.

Aid groups have described the latest bloody episode of Syria's eight-year civil war as a "nightmare".

On the ground, regime air raids yesterday pummeled a market in the Idlib province town of Saraqib. One civilian was killed and several others were wounded there, four

days after a similar attack killed more than seven there.

It said two other civilians were killed and 20 others were wounded in regime attacks elsewhere in the region.

Bachelet warned of continued regime attacks against schools, hospitals, markets and bakeries in the Idlib region.

"These are civilian objects, and it seems highly unlikely, given the persistent pattern of such attacks, that they are all being hit by accident," she said in a statement.

"Intentional attacks against civilians are war crimes, and those who have ordered them or carried them out are criminally responsible for their actions."

The region under attack is home to some three million people, nearly half of them already displaced from other parts of the country. It covers nearly all of Idlib and parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia provinces. The Idlib region is controlled by jihadist alliance Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, led by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate.

UN said that since the end of April it had documented 39 attacks against health facilities or medical workers in the region. At least 50 schools have been damaged by the air strikes and shelling, it added.



China's police state goes global

Uighur Muslims living abroad live in fear, intimidation

AFP, Sydney

Muslims who escaped China's crackdown in Xinjiang still live in fear, saying new homes abroad and even Western passports afford them no protection against a state-driven global campaign of intimidation.

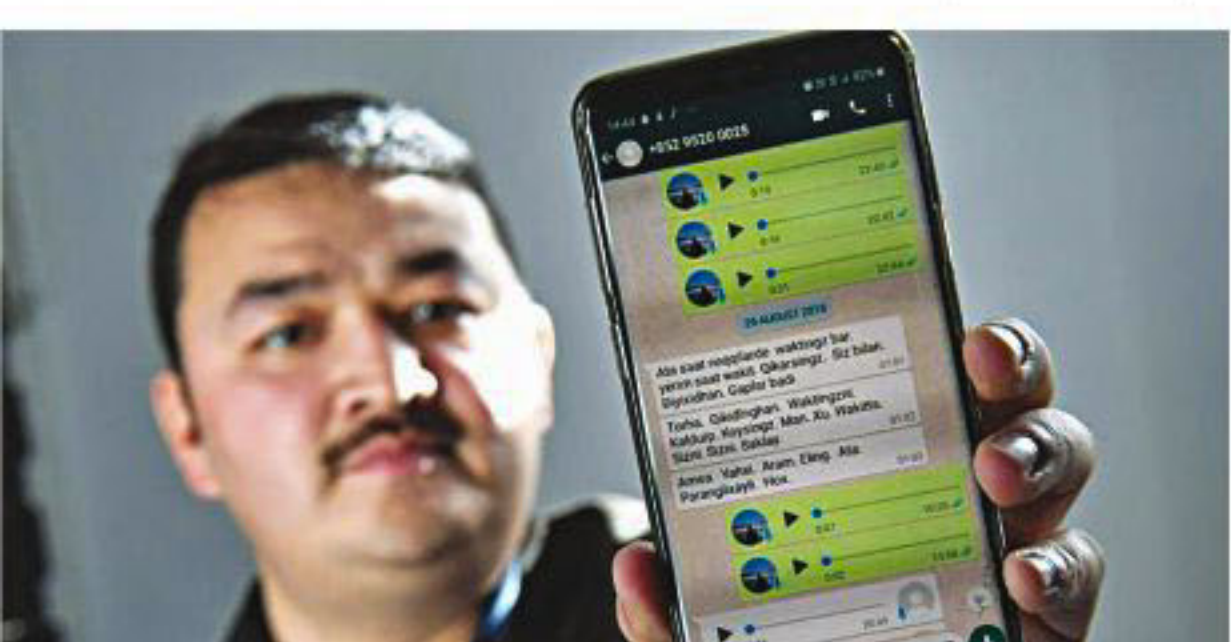
With menacing text and voice messages, and explicit threats to relatives still living in Xinjiang, China's powerful state security apparatus has extended its reach to Uighurs living in liberal democracies as far away as New Zealand and US, in a bid to silence activists and recruit informants.

The Communist Party's dragnet in Xinjiang has swept an estimated one million ethnic Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities into "vocational education centres" that numerous studies and reports have exposed as harsh internment camps.

For those who managed to get out and settle overseas, the search for a true safe haven has remained elusive as they complain they and their families have been remotely harried and harassed to the point of desperation.

Guly Mahsut, who fled to Canada, says she became suicidal and was hospitalised after being bombarded with messages from Xinjiang police threatening her family in the troubled province.

"You should have been more cooperative. Don't become the source of misfortune for your relatives and family in Toksun. You should be more considerate of your family,"



read one message, allegedly from an official named "Kaysar".

The 37-year-old believes she was targeted because she spoke out against authorities online, and has helped stateless Uighurs seek help abroad.

She received messages from relatives -- including her younger sister -- pleading with her to "cooperate" with authorities.

Mahsut is one of more than a dozen Uighur exiles AFP interviewed across four continents that gave access to scores of text and voice messages -- purportedly from Chinese security operatives -- demanding their silence or cooperation.

Shir Muhammad Hasan managed to get to Australia in 2017. Having secured refugee status, he thought he was safe. Little more than a year later, the sinister messages began to arrive.

The assault has led some Uighurs -- even those with foreign nationality or permanent residency abroad -- to believe nowhere is safe from China's police state.



Two boys cool off in a fountain at Gotaplatsen in central Gothenburg, Sweden, yesterday. Anxious farmers counted the cost and sweltering workers breathed a sigh of relief yesterday as a heatwave lifted from northern Europe after toppling decades-old temperature records. At its peak on Thursday, the heatwave smashed national temperature records in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands while Paris baked in its highest ever temperature of 42.6-degree Celsius.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ROW OVER US DEMAND TO FREE US RAPPER

Swedish politicians slam Trump for 'interference'

AFP, Stockholm

Swedish politicians yesterday fired back at US President Donald Trump, after he rowed with Prime Minister Stefan Lofven over Sweden's move to press assault charges against American rapper ASAP Rocky.

Several Swedish politicians protested Trump's remarks, after the president took to Twitter on Thursday to express his frustration.

"Very disappointed in Prime Minister Stefan Lofven for being unable to act. Sweden has let our African American Community down in the United States," Trump tweeted, adding: "Give ASAP Rocky his FREEDOM."

He also tweeted "We do so much for Sweden but it doesn't seem to work the other way around."

But Swedish politicians were quick to offer rebuttals, with some highlighting that the charges against the rapper, stemming from a June 30 street brawl in Stockholm, were laid by prosecutors and were not arbitrary.

"Political interference in the process is distinctly off limits! Clear?" Former prime minister Carl Bildt tweeted. In a comment to newspaper Aftonbladet, Bildt also commended the government for choosing not to engage, saying it was wise to avoid "mud wrestling with Trump".

Natali Sial, a spokeswoman for the Swedish government, said they did not have anything further to add after Trump's latest statements.

"In Sweden everyone is equal before the law. The White House has been informed of this. Now the judicial process will run its course," Sial told AFP.

KARGIL CONFLICT ANNIV

India army chief warns Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India's army chief yesterday warned Pakistan that it would get a "bloody nose" if there was a repeat of a bloody battle which took place 20 years ago.

Amidst renewed tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours, General Bipin Rawat cautioned Pakistan as India staged nationwide ceremonies for the anniversary of the end of the three-month Kargil conflict.

About 1,000 Indian and Pakistani soldiers died in the battle which has gone down in history as the world's highest. In May 1999, Pakistani troops and rebels crossed the disputed Kashmir border and seized Indian military posts in the Kargil mountains vacated during winter months because of the intense cold at 18,000 feet (5,486 metres).

Indian troops eventually pushed the Pakistan military back. The Indian military has held ceremonies every July 26 since. "This (Kargil) was a misadventure. Misadventures should not be repeated. You will get a bloody nose next time," Rawat said referring to Pakistan at a media briefing in Indian Kashmir.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted a photo from 1999 when he said he went to Kargil to "show solidarity with our brave soldiers". He paid tributes to the "mighty warriors who sacrificed everything to defend the motherland".

Pompeo ready for Iran visit 'if needed'

9 Indian crew from seized tanker freed

AGENCIES

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Thursday he was willing to go to Iran for talks amid tensions between Tehran and Washington, but also called on Japan, Britain and other nations to join a maritime force to guard oil tankers sailing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Asked if he would be willing to go to Tehran, Pompeo said in an interview with Bloomberg TV: "Sure. If that's the call, I'd happily go there... I would welcome the chance to speak directly to the Iranian people."

Tensions between Iran and the United States have ratcheted up since last year, when President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Iranian nuclear deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, saying it was not strong enough. Washington also reimposed sanctions on Tehran.

The relationship between the two countries has come under increased strain over the past three months following attacks on oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz off the coast of Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran has freed nine of 12 Indian crew from a Panama-flagged tanker seized on July 14, India's foreign ministry said yesterday.

Iran had accused the MT Riah ship of smuggling contraband fuel when it was detained.

The release left 21 other Indians in Iranian detention however, including three from the MT Riah and 18 from the British-flagged Stena Impero tanker which was also captured by Iranian forces on July 19. Apart from the 18 Indians, there are three Russians, a Latvian and a Filipino on the ship.

India announced on Thursday that its diplomats in Iran had been given access to Stena Impero crew.

Johnson putting Britain on 'collision course' with EU

Says Irish minister over his Brexit stance

AGENCIES

New Prime Minister Boris Johnson has deliberately set Britain on a "collision course" with the EU over Brexit negotiations, Ireland's foreign minister was quoted as saying yesterday.

"He seems to have made a deliberate decision to set Britain on a collision course with the European Union and with Ireland in relation to the Brexit negotiations," Simon Coveney was quoted by Irish state broadcaster RTE as saying in Belfast.

"I think only he can answer the question as to why he's doing that."

In his maiden parliamentary speech as prime minister on Thursday Johnson promised to press ahead with plans to reopen the deal agreed with the EU -- despite firm pushback from other EU leaders.

Tension around the withdrawal deal centres on the so-called backstop -- a mechanism designed to preserve the EU's

single market and prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland.

The clause was the chief reason the deal thrice failed to pass through the British parliament under Johnson's predecessor Theresa May, bringing the nation to the brink of a crash out, requiring extensions from the EU and ultimately unseating her from power.

But on Thursday Johnson hardened rhetoric around a no-deal Brexit, which would see Britain leave the trading bloc without cushioning measures on October 31 if a deal cannot be brokered.

Coveney said Johnson's remarks were "very unhelpful".

Johnson spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday night, Johnson's spokesman told reporters, saying the new British leader used the call to set out his position on Brexit.

Johnson also held calls with political leaders from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the spokesman said.



Snake forces adjournment of parliament in Nigeria

A snake burst onto the chamber floor of a state parliament building in southwest Nigeria, sending lawmakers scampering and forcing an indefinite recess, officials said yesterday. "When we were about to enter into plenary, a big snake just ran out of the chamber which disrupted our sitting and we had to hurriedly leave the chamber," said Olugbenga Omole, a spokesman for lawmakers from Ondo State. The snake appears to have fallen from the roof into the plenary chamber. It did not bite anyone before it was caught and killed by parliament staff, said Omole. He blamed the incident on the dilapidated state of the assembly due to a lack of funds and overdue maintenance. He said lawmakers would not return until a proper fumigation of the complex was done.

Yediyurappa sworn in as Karnataka CM

A Bharatiya Janata Party government was installed in Karnataka yesterday when senior party leader BS Yediyurappa was sworn in as Chief Minister of the state, three days after the fall of a Congress-Janata Dal(S) coalition. The 14-month-old Congress-Janata Dal(S) government lost the confidence motion moved by chief minister H D Kumaraswamy in the assembly by 99-105 votes. Yediyurappa alone was sworn-in. This is the fourth stint for Yediyurappa as chief minister -- the last one was after the May, 2018 assembly polls when he lasted barely for three days after being sworn in.

Cows exhale oxygen!



Indian state Uttarakhand's Chief Minister and BJP leader Trivendra Singh Rawat has kicked up a row by claiming that cow is the only animal which inhales and exhales oxygen. A video went viral on Thursday showing Rawat extolling the medicinal properties of cow milk and urine at a function. The CM also said that massaging a cow can cure one of breathing problems, while living in close proximity with the animal can cure one of tuberculosis. In 2017, s Rajasthan minister also claimed the same. The CM's cow speech comes after State BJP president and Nainital MP Ajay Bhatt recently said that pregnant women can avoid caesarean deliveries if they drink water of Garud Ganga, a river in Bageshwar district. An official at the CMO defended the CM's remarks saying that he was only stating something which is a common belief in the hills of Uttarakhand.

SOURCE: AFP, THE HINDU