

NEWSIN brief

Mumbai rain: IMD issues red alert

INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

A part of a bridge on the Ulhas river linking Murbad to Kalyan in Maharashtra's Thane district got washed away in the early hours of yesterday due to heavy rains. Stretches of the road were damaged as well, affecting traffic on the highway linking Mumbai to Ahmedabad in neighbouring Gujarat. Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert for Mumbai, Thane and Palghar, Raigad for tomorrow.

Five doctors killed in Libya air raid: ministry

AFP, Tripoli

Five doctors were killed in an air strike by forces of Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar on a field hospital near the capital, the health ministry of the UN-recognised government said. Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army launched an offensive in April to try to wrest Tripoli from forces of the Government of National Accord which is based in the capital. Pro-GNA forces have weathered the initial onslaught and since then fighting has remained deadlocked on the outskirts of the city, with both sides resorting to air strikes.

North Korea releases Russian fishing boat

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has released a Russian fishing boat with a crew of 15 Russians and two South Koreans after it was detained for violating entry regulations, the Russian embassy in Pyongyang said yesterday. The release comes nearly two weeks after North Korean border guards took control of the ship belonging to the Russian North-Eastern Fishing Company on July 17. The vessel, named Xiang Hai Lin 8, left the North Korean port of Wonsan late Saturday, the embassy said in a Facebook post.



Members of the Syrian Civil Defence (White Helmets) gather at the site of a reported air strike on the town of Ariha, in the south of Syria's Idlib province, yesterday. Regime and Russian bombardment yesterday killed 9 civilians in northwestern Syria where ramped up attacks by the two allies have claimed hundreds of lives since April, a war monitor said.

PHOTO: AFP

EUROPEAN FLEET IN GULF

Iran slams Britain's bid as 'provocative'

AGENCIES

Iran yesterday slammed as "provocative" a British proposal for a European-led naval mission to escort tankers in the Gulf, amid soaring tensions over the seizure of ships. "We heard that they intend to send a European fleet to the Persian Gulf which naturally carries a hostile message, is provocative and will increase tensions," said government spokesman Ali Rabiei. Britain said on Monday it was planning a European-led force to escort tankers through the world's busiest oil shipping lane in response to Iran's seizure of a UK-flagged vessel on July 19. The seizure of the Stena Impero came two weeks after British authorities detained an Iranian tanker -- the Grace 1 -- off its overseas territory Gibraltar on allegations it was breaching EU sanctions on Syria. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said such a force would only make matters worse, reported AFP. "The presence of foreign forces will not help the region's security and will be the main source of tensions," Rouhani said after talks in Tehran with Oman's minister of state for foreign affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi. Iran yesterday invited Mike Pompeo to be interviewed by a state television anchor who was once detained in America, after the top US diplomat said he was willing to talk to its people. Meanwhile, parties to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal met in Vienna yesterday for emergency talks called in response to an escalation in tensions between Iran and the West that included Tehran's breaches of the accord, reported Reuters.

'Rodent infested mess'

Trump's branding of mostly-black Baltimore draws flak

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump was hit with new accusations of racism yesterday after he attacked a prominent African-American lawmaker and branded the majority black city of Baltimore an "infested mess." Trump's outburst came in a series of sharply worded tweets aimed at Democratic Representative Elijah Cummings -- a high-profile critic of Trump's administration whose district covers much of Baltimore. "Cumming (sic) District is a disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess," the president wrote, calling it "the worst run and most dangerous anywhere in the United States." "No human being would want to live there," he said -- in an attack ostensibly provoked by Cummings' criticism of the harsh conditions facing would-be asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border. As chairman of the House Oversight Committee, Cummings -- one of the most prominent African Americans in Congress -- has launched investigations into Trump administration policies,

including reports of poor treatment at migrant detention centers. The morning diatribe ignited a storm of criticism, less than two weeks after the House of Representatives condemned Trump for "racist" comments targeting four first-term Democratic congresswomen who are ethnic minorities.



The top Democrat in Congress, Nancy Pelosi, accused Trump of a "racist" attack on a "champion... of civil rights and economic justice, a beloved leader in Baltimore, and deeply valued colleague." Former vice president Joe Biden -- the Democratic frontrunner to challenge Trump in 2020 -- called out the president directly on Twitter.

"It is despicable for you to attack him and the people of Baltimore this way," Biden wrote. "Once again you have proved yourself unfit to hold the office. A President is supposed to lift this nation up. Not tear it down." There was similar condemnation from half a dozen White House candidates including Cory Booker, who tweeted footage of a black CNN anchor and Baltimore native who broke down on air while reacting to the attack on his hometown. "This is painful. This is a moral, defining moment in America," wrote Booker. "Silence is toxic complicity." The editorial board of the city's newspaper, The Baltimore Sun, took a direct swipe at Trump in a scathing column which concluded that it is "better to have a few rats than to be one." The broadside was reminiscent of Trump's recent, racially charged onslaught against four young Democratic women lawmakers, who he said should "go back" to the "crime infested" places they came from. In fact, three were born in the US and all are American citizens.

Deployment of 10,000 fresh troops in Kashmir sparks fear

Authorities call it routine move; locals fear major decision on J&K's special privileges may be at stake

AFP, Srinagar

Tensions in Indian-administered Kashmir rose yesterday over the weekend deployment of at least 10,000 paramilitary troops to the troubled region despite authorities' assertions the move was routine. India maintains a deployment of 500,000 soldiers in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region, which has been divided between the South Asian nation and Pakistan since their split in 1947. The region has seen a resurgence of hostilities in recent years, while locals are fearful about the loss of special privileges after India's Supreme Court last year began hearing a case challenging a constitutional provision. Officials said the movement of troops -- set to rise to 20,000 -- was to relieve exhausted personnel deployed since local civic polls last year and now monitoring an annual Hindu pilgrimage. "Troops have been working constantly for seven months. Some have to go on leave

and some for training outside," Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh told AFP. "We have requisitioned for 200 companies (20,000 troops), more might arrive." A senior security official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said the deployment was to guard against possible protests about a decision or event, without giving further details. He added that India's security set-up in Kashmir was "being re-oriented like never before." Locals told AFP they were worried Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government wanted to set aside a constitutional provision -- Article 35A -- which would allow Indians from outside the disputed territory to buy land there. India's part of Kashmir was brought under New Delhi's direct rule in June 2018 after Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) withdrew support for its local partner and dissolved the elected local government.

BID TO STOP JAKARTA SINKING

Giant sea wall 'must be built quickly': Widodo

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A giant sea wall around the sinking capital of Indonesia must be built quickly to prevent swathes of the city being submerged, the country's president warned on Friday. Joko Widodo's comments lent renewed urgency to a meandering and politically contested mega project, which the government first considered a decade ago and is expected to cost £34bn. Experts estimate one third of Jakarta, home to millions of people, could sink beneath the sea by 2050 -- an unforgiving timeframe fuelled by longstanding structural problems and rising seas. The existential crisis facing the city, parts of which are sinking by 20cm a year, is the culmination of decades of unfettered development of vast skyscrapers on swampy ground, almost nonexistent urban planning and misrule by city politicians serving private interests. Lacking a comprehensive water network, industry and homeowners have dug into the city's natural underground water supplies, causing rapid collapse in the city's north. "This huge project will need to be done quickly to prevent Jakarta from sinking under the sea," Widodo said. The president, re-elected in May for a final five-year term, addressed other ambitious plans for Jakarta -- a forward-looking, but polluted, sprawling metropolis of 30 million, when counting those living in the outer limits.



Police officers detain a demonstrator during a protest against police violence during previous marches, near China's Liaison Office, Hong Kong, yesterday. Riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets yesterday evening to disperse pro-democracy protesters close to Beijing's office in Hong Kong, plunging the financial hub deeper into crisis.

14 killed in landslide at Myanmar jade mine

A landslide at a Myanmar jade mine killed 14 people including at least one policeman in the early hours of yesterday as earth and mud engulfed a guard post, and four people were missing and feared dead, police said. The jade hub of Hpakant, in Kachin State in the north of the country, is frequently hit by deadly accidents, despite government pledges to clean up the lucrative mining industry. The government has ordered all mining activity in Hpakant to cease during Myanmar's May-October monsoon season, but people in the area say scavengers still scour tailing piles for jade.

14 Karnataka rebel lawmakers disqualified

Eleven rebel lawmakers of the Congress and three from HD Kumaraswamy's Janata Dal Secular were disqualified by Karnataka Speaker KR Ramesh Kumar yesterday. The move brings down the majority mark in the assembly within the reach of the newly formed BJP government, which is expected to face a trust vote in the state assembly today. On Thursday, the Speaker had disqualified three lawmakers. Yesterday's disqualifications bring down the strength of the House to 208, and the majority mark slides to 105 -- a number the BJP currently has. All the lawmakers have been disqualified from the assembly till the end of its term, which calls for by-elections in all 16 constituencies. Despite apparent setback, Congress welcomes the move saying the move will teach a lesson to lawmakers in the country about BJP's trap.

Afghan candidate hurt as Kabul blast kills two



A powerful explosion hit central Kabul yesterday, wounding Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's running mate in the upcoming election and killing at least two others, officials said. At least 25 civilians were injured in the blast that occurred on a road near the private Ghalib University and Shahid Square, a four-way intersection, interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said. Rahimi said that immediately after the blast, gunmen had entered the university building and were targeting the main political office of the vice presidential candidate, Amrullah Saleh. Saleh was wounded by shrapnel before being safely evacuated from the office of his Afghan Green Trend Party. The party office is located adjacent to the university. SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

UK ramps up preparations

Say senior ministers assuming EU won't budge

REUTERS, London

The British government is working on the assumption that the European Union will not renegotiate its Brexit deal and is ramping up preparations to leave the bloc on Oct 31 without an agreement, senior ministers said yesterday. Boris Johnson, who took over as British prime minister on Wednesday with a promise to deliver Brexit by the end of October "no ifs or buts", has said he plans to seek a new exit deal with the EU. The EU has said repeatedly that the deal cannot be reopened. Leading Brexit supporter Michael Gove, who Johnson has put in charge of 'no deal' preparations, wrote in the Sunday Times newspaper that the government would undertake "intensive efforts" to secure a better deal from the EU. "We still hope they will change their minds, but we must operate on the assumption that they will not ...

No deal is now a very real prospect and we must make sure that we are ready," Gove wrote. "Planning for no deal is now this government's no. 1 priority," he said, adding "every penny needed" for no

NO-DEAL BREXIT



deal preparations would be made available. The SundayTimes also reported that Dominic Cummings, the mastermind behind the 2016 referendum campaign to leave the EU and now a senior aide to Johnson, told a meeting of the prime minister's advisers that

he had been tasked with delivering Brexit "by any means necessary". Ministers are preparing for a no-deal emergency budget in the week of Oct. 7, the newspaper added. Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, new finance minister Sajid Javid said he had ordered no deal preparations in his Treasury department to be stepped up. Javid, a former interior minister, said this would include funding for 500 new Border Force officers. Johnson has said the Irish backstop, an insurance policy designed to prevent the return of a hard border between EU-member Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland by provisionally keeping Britain in a customs union with the EU, must be removed from any Brexit deal. It was one of the most hotly contested elements of the divorce agreement his predecessor Theresa May reached with the EU, and opposition to it was a key driver behind the deal being rejected three times by parliament.

Western intel hacked 'Russia's Google' Yandex

REUTERS, Washington/London/San Francisco

Hackers working for Western intelligence agencies broke into Russian internet search company Yandex in late 2018, deploying a rare type of malware in an attempt to spy on user accounts, four people with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. The malware, called Regin, is known to be used by the "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing alliance of the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, the sources said. Intelligence agencies in those countries declined to comment. Western cyberattacks against Russia are seldom acknowledged or spoken about in public. It could not be determined which of the five countries was behind the attack on Yandex, said sources in Russia and elsewhere, three of whom had direct knowledge of the hack. The breach took place between October and November 2018. Yandex, widely known as "Russia's Google" for its array of online services from internet search to email and taxi reservations, says it has more than 108 million monthly users in Russia. It also operates in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Turkey. The hack of Yandex's research and development unit was intended for espionage purposes rather than to disrupt or steal intellectual property, the sources said. The hackers covertly maintained access to Yandex for at least several weeks without being detected, they said. The Regin malware was identified as a Five Eyes tool in 2014 following revelations by former US National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden.