

INDO-PAK BORDER FIRING

3 killed, 31 hurt in Pak Kashmir

50 Chinese nationals evacuated

Pakistani officials evacuated more than 50 Chinese nationals working near the Kashmir frontier, authorities said yesterday, after skirmishes with India killed at least three people and injured dozens.

The Chinese were working on a dam being constructed in Pakistani Kashmir along the confluence of the Neelum and Jhelum rivers when firing pushed authorities to move the workers late Tuesday, according to a senior local administration official Badar Munir.

Another local official Raja Shahid Mahmood said the decision was made after Indian security forces fired a volley of "indiscriminate fire that killed three people including a woman and a child and wounded 31 others during the last 24 hours".

Mahmood said local mosques have also called on residents to refrain from unnecessary movements which would expose them to potential firing.

Pakistan's military spokesman went on to say via Twitter that ceasefire violations "shall always be effectively responded" to, adding that security forces will "take all measures to protect innocent civilians" along the de-facto border.

Tensions remain high with arch-rival India after the nuclear armed neighbours launched tit-for-tat air strikes in February following a suicide bombing in Indian Kashmir which was claimed by Pakistan-based militants.

Since then they have stepped back from the brink, but firing between the two sides across the de-facto border dividing Kashmir has continued.



A police officer (L) points a firearm during a clash with protesters who had gathered outside Kwai Chung police station, in support of protesters detained with the charge of rioting, in Hong Kong late Tuesday. Inset, Demonstrators hold signs as they gather outside a court yesterday in support of the detained protesters.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWSIN brief

Macron, Rouhani hold talks amid tensions

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday spoke with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani and reiterated his call for a de-escalation of tensions between Iran and the United States, the Elysee said. Paris has engaged in intense diplomacy seeking to solve the current tensions, with Macron's foreign policy adviser Emmanuel Bonne twice visiting Tehran.

12 killed as flooding paralyses Karachi

At least 12 people were killed as monsoon rains lashed Pakistan's port city of Karachi, officials and charity groups confirmed yesterday, while flooding also triggered power outages and overwhelmed the metropolis's fragile infrastructure. Authorities said the deaths occurred largely due to electrocutions caused by ill-maintained power lines even as large segments of the city suffered hours-long outages that lasted up to a day in some areas.

Indian coffee king's body found by river



AFP, New Delhi

The body of a billionaire Indian coffee magnate who went missing amid financial troubles was found by a river in southern India, police said yesterday. VG Siddhartha, founder of the Cafe Coffee Day chain that beat Starbucks at its own game in India, was last seen Monday next to the Nethravathi river near Mangaluru and reported missing soon after by his chauffeur. Police said an investigation was underway to determine whether Siddhartha took his own life.

N Korea tests 2 missiles

Says Seoul; Pyongyang's second launch in a week comes as US, S Korea prepare for military drills

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles early yesterday, the South Korean military said, only days after it launched two similar missiles intended to pressure South Korea and the United States to stop upcoming military drills.

The firings follow launches on July 25, North Korea's first missile tests since leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump met on June 30 and agreed to revive stalled denuclearisation talks.

The series of missile tests raises the stakes for US and South Korean diplomats criss-crossing the region this week in the hope of restarting talks aimed at persuading Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.

"North Korea's actions do not help ease military tensions, nor do they help keep the momentum for talks that are under



way," South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha told reporters in Seoul before leaving for a Southeast Asian security forum in Bangkok.

Kang urged North Korea to halt the missile launches.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the top US North Korea negotiator were also headed to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Regional Forum in the Thai capital, where Pompeo said he was holding out hope that US officials could meet North Korean counterparts.

Trump and Pompeo both played down last week's launches and Pompeo has continued to express hope for a diplomatic way forward with North Korea.

The latest launch comes ahead of newly appointed US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's first official visit to Seoul, which the Pentagon said on Tuesday was scheduled as part of a tour through Asia in August.

Tensions high in Hong Kong

AFP, Hong Kong

Dozens of Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters appeared in court yesterday after being charged with rioting, setting the stage for further unrest in a weeks-long crisis that has rocked the global financial hub.

The announcement on Tuesday night that 44 people had been charged with rioting -- an offence that carries a jail term of up to 10 years -- immediately triggered another round of clashes between police and protesters.

Supporters continued to voice their outrage as they stood for hours yesterday outside court, braving heavy winds and rain, as the accused rioters appeared before a judge.

The protesters were generally calm as they took turns to appear in front of the judge, who formally read the charges and granted them bail.

The range of their professions reflected the wide support across Hong Kong society for the pro-democracy movement. They included a teacher, a nurse, an airline pilot, a barber, a chef, an electrician, a construction worker and unemployed people, according to

- their charge sheets.
- Semi-autonomous Hong Kong has endured more than seven weeks of unrest that began with a government bid to introduce a law that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China. Though the bill has been declared dead by authorities, the
- Court grants bail to 44 pro-democracy protesters
- Most defendants ordered to abide by midnight curfew
- Outraged Hong Kong's civil servants voice rare dissent
- China halts individual travel to Taiwan

protests has evolved into a movement for deeper democratic reforms and an end to eroding freedoms, in the most significant challenge to Beijing's rule since the city's handover from Britain in 1997.

Meanwhile, growing ranks of Hong Kong's typically conservative and

publicity-shy bureaucrats have begun an unprecedented online dissent campaign against the city's pro-Beijing leaders.

Multiple open letters have been signed by hundreds of anonymous civil servants in the past week condemning the administration of city leader Carrie Lam and the police. A group of civil servants have also announced plans to hold a rally on Friday night -- something unheard of from a demographic that usually eschews politics.

In another development, China stepped up pressure on Taiwan yesterday as it announced the suspension of individual travel permits to the self-ruled democratic island "due to current cross-strait relations".

A programme had allowed Chinese citizens in 47 mainland cities to apply for permits to visit Taiwan on their own instead of visiting on group tours.

But the tourism ministry said in a brief statement that their issuance would be suspended from Thursday, a move that could hurt the island's economy.

Israel okays 700 Palestinian homes, 6,000 settler homes

Israeli ministers have given rare approval to 700 Palestinian homes in the part of the occupied West Bank under the country's full control while also approving 6,000 homes for settlers, an Israeli official said yesterday. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the approval by Israel's security cabinet on Tuesday ahead of an expected visit by US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner. It was not immediately clear if all of the homes will be new construction or if some already exist and are receiving retroactive approval.

Half of US voters think Trump is racist: poll

Slightly more than half of US voters believe President Donald Trump is racist, according to a poll published on Tuesday. Fifty-one percent of those surveyed in the Quinnipiac University poll said Trump is racist while 45 percent said he is not. Forty-six percent of white voters polled said the president is racist while 50 percent said he is not. Eighty percent of black voters said Trump is racist while 11 percent said he is not. As for Hispanic voters, 55 percent said he is racist while 44 percent said he is not. Fifty-five percent of men said he is not racist while 41 percent said he is. As for women, 59 percent said he is racist while 36 percent said he is not.

Dubai ruler's wife seeks UK protection order

The estranged wife of the ruler of Dubai has applied for a UK forced marriage protection order relating to their children, a London court heard Tuesday. Princess Haya, 45, a wife of 70-year-old United Arab Emirates Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, has applied for the order, as well as for wardship of their children, and a non-molestation order relating to herself, the High Court heard. According to UK's Press Association news agency, the judge allowed the media to report limited details of the case. Sheikh Mohammed, who has asked for his children to return to Dubai where he lives, was not present in court. A forced marriage protection order can be made under English law to protect a person from being forced into a marriage or help someone already in forced marriage, for example by preventing the person from being taken abroad. Princess Haya is a daughter of the late King Hussein of Jordan and a half-sister of King Abdullah II of Jordan.



SOURCE: AFP

ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting

31 July 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (5th L) poses for a family photo with foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) countries during the Asean-China Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Stop sowing distrust

China takes a dig at US as Asean foreign ministers meet

AFP, Bangkok

China yesterday urged non-Asian nations to avoid sowing "distrust" and division over contested seas in a swipe at the US shortly before its top diplomat was due to arrive at a Bangkok summit bearing a message of reinvigorated American trade and security engagement in the region.

The big power rivalry, framed by a trade war that has withered global growth, has dominated the summit of Southeast Asian foreign ministers, which opened Wednesday.

Beijing's military ambitions in contested seas and airspace are poised to rub up against a drive -- led by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo -- to reassert the US' role as a key Asia-Pacific power.

China is accused of deploying warships, arming outposts and ramming fishing vessels in contested territory in the South China Sea, one of the world's key shipping routes, which the US is desperate to keep open.

Meanwhile, China staunchly disputes the right of outside powers - principally the US - to influence an issue in what it considers to be its "neighbourhood".

"We think non-regional countries should not deliberately amplify such differences that have

been left from the past," China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters.

Outside countries must not "to sow distrust between China and Asean countries", he added, referencing the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"In a word, China will continue to view Asean as a priority in its neighbourhood."

The administration of Donald Trump, which yanked the US from a massive Asia-Pacific trade pact, has launched a rebranded "Indo-Pacific" security, open seas and commerce strategy.

That includes "ensuring the freedom of seas and skies; insulating sovereign nations from external coercion", a senior State Department official said.

Pompeo is set to meet with his Chinese counterpart today.

Fresh security tensions will also get an airing, including an unprecedented joint China-Russia bomber patrol last week that angered Japan and South Korea.

While China denies it flouted Japanese or Korean airspace, the exercise has rattled Tokyo and Seoul -- and posed a new test of Washington's influence in a region home to the two crucial US allies.

2020 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY RACE

Liberals under fire in second debate

AFP, Detroit

The ideological divide between Democratic presidential hopefuls came into focus Tuesday as leading progressive candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren defended their liberal policies on healthcare and immigration against surprisingly energetic attacks from moderate rivals.

The fault lines emerged immediately in the second debate of the 2020 Democratic primary race, with lesser-known candidates taking sharp digs and warning that forcing radical change could ensure President Donald Trump's re-election.

Warren demanded "big, structural change" and warned that political "spinelessness" over radical reforms will perpetuate a "rigged system that has helped the wealthy and well-connected and kicked dirt in the faces of everyone else."

But she and Sanders faced dramatic pushback including from ex-congressman John Delaney who delivered a scathing rebuke to their "fairy tale economics" that risk bankrupting the economy.

The debate features 20 candidates over two nights in Detroit, Michigan, a battleground state Trump snatched in 2016.

Frontrunner Joe Biden takes the stage Wednesday with senators Kamala Harris and Cory Booker, prominent African-American candidates who have strongly criticized the former vice president on racial issues.

UK PM holds Belfast talks on Brexit backstop riddle

REUTERS, Belfast

Britain's new Prime Minister Boris Johnson held talks in Northern Ireland yesterday in a bid to untangle an impasse over the Irish border "backstop" that has scuppered all efforts to secure an orderly withdrawal from the European Union.

Plans for the border have become the most contentious issue in negotiations with the EU, and the British pound has tumbled in recent days as Johnson said Britain would leave without a deal on Oct 31 unless the backstop was scrapped.

The head of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald, said she warned Johnson that leaving without a deal would be catastrophic for the economy and the 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of violence in the region.

Some 3,600 people died in sectarian violence commonly known as The Troubles.

Johnson began his trip with talks on Tuesday evening with the leadership of the Democratic Unionist Party, the largest

pro-British party in the region whose 10 members in the Westminster parliament prop up the Conservative government.

After the meeting DUP leader Arlene Foster repeated Johnson's demand that the backstop, designed as an insurance policy to prevent border controls between Ireland and Northern Ireland, be scrapped. "It is very important that the backstop goes," she said.

But a senior DUP lawmaker also at the meeting said possible compromises were discussed - specifically the possibility of putting a time limit on the backstop and other "pragmatic solutions."

Asked if Johnson's was responsive to the suggestion, Donaldson told Irish radio RTE that he would not "negotiate in public on this."

The Irish power-sharing administration was suspended two-and-a-half years ago because of differences between the parties representing mainly Protestant pro-British unionists and mainly Catholic nationalists who favour a united Ireland.

