

# NEWSIN brief

## 7 Maoists killed in Chhattisgarh

AFP, New Delhi

Indian special forces killed seven suspected Maoist rebels in a raid on a jungle camp yesterday, police said. The far-left rebels in the central state of Chhattisgarh are part of a long-standing conflict that has left tens of thousands dead since the 1960s. They were in a camp in dense forest in Rajnandgaon district, some 70 kilometres from the state capital Raipur. Chhattisgarh is mineral rich but among India's poorest states, and guerrillas are demanding greater rights over land and resources.

## Venezuela rivals in Barbados talks

REUTERS, Oslo/Caracas

The government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and the opposition are continuing to hold talks in Barbados in an effort to find ways to resolve the Latin American country's political crisis, the Foreign Ministry of mediator Norway said on Friday. Maduro, who after saying the dialogue was progressing and that he would "meet even with the devil," alleged that the United States is timing new sanctions on Venezuelan officials to coincide with the new rounds of talks.

## Indonesia quake: 4 dead, several hurt

AFP, Jakarta

Four people died and several were injured after a powerful undersea earthquake rocked Indonesia's heavily populated Java island, triggering a brief tsunami warning, the national disaster agency said Yesterday. The 6.9 magnitude quake on Friday evening sent residents fleeing to higher ground, while many in the capital Jakarta ran into the streets. Three people died of heart attacks as the strong quake rocked the region. Another person fell to his death while trying to flee his house when the jolt happened, he said.



Riot police officers detain a participant of an unsanctioned rally urging fair elections at Moscow's Pushkinskaya Square, yesterday. Nearly 300 protesters were arrested at the rally. The rally is the latest in a series of demonstrations after officials refused to let popular opposition candidates run in next month's city parliament elections.

# Trump drops US spy chief pick

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump on Friday dropped his choice of John Ratcliffe to be US spy chief after questions arose about the congressman's lack of experience and possible exaggerations in his resume, marking the latest upheaval over a top national security post. Trump announced the move five days after he surprised many in Washington by making the conservative Republican lawmaker from Texas his selection to replace Daniel Coats as director of national intelligence, a post that oversees the 17 U.S. civilian and military intelligence agencies including the CIA. According to a source familiar with the situation, Trump is considering Republican Representatives Michael McCaul and Devin Nunes for the job. McCaul is a former chairman of the House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee and Nunes is a former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Trump told reporters at the White House he has "a list of three people" he will consider for the job this weekend. The Republican president blamed unflattering news coverage for Ratcliffe's decision to bow out and instead remain in the House. Ratcliffe, 53, faced a potentially difficult Senate confirmation process. The vacancy comes as the US intelligence community grapples with an array of challenges, including the threat of foreign interference in next year's US elections, the impact of a rising China, escalating tensions with Iran, North Korea's nuclear program and the desire to end years of conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Trump announced last Sunday that Coats, who had clashed with him over assessments involving Russia, Iran and North Korea, will step down on Aug 15. Ratcliffe, a Trump loyalist and the most junior member of the House Intelligence Committee, had been tapped, but not formally nominated, to replace Coats.

# HK protesters defy China

Cops fire tear gas as thousands march for reforms

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong riot police fired tear gas yesterday evening at pro-democracy protesters in a popular tourist district, as violence rocked the international finance hub once more despite increasingly stern warnings from China. The semi-autonomous southern Chinese financial hub has seen two months of protests and clashes triggered by opposition to a planned extradition law that quickly evolved into a wider movement for democratic reforms. Authorities in Hong Kong and Beijing this week signalled a hardening stance, including with the arrests of dozens of protesters, and the Chinese military saying it was ready to quell the "intolerable" unrest if requested. But protesters have remained unyielding, vowing to hold multiple occupations and rallies in the coming days. Yesterday's violence -- the ninth consecutive weekend of clashes -- took place in Tsim Sha Tsui, a usually bustling harbour-side district known for its luxury malls and hotels. Officers with gas masks and shields charged at hundreds of protesters who had been besieging a nearby police station. Masked demonstrators had smashed the windows of cars in the police parking lot and daubed nearby walls with graffiti. One team of protesters created a large slingshot -- held up by two members -- to launch bricks at the building. Police fired volleys of tear gas followed by baton charges and made multiple arrests. Earlier, protesters seized roads, built barricades and even briefly blocked a cross-harbour tunnel. Hong Kong has witnessed two months of huge rallies -- often followed by violent clashes between police and small groups of hardcore protesters. And there is no sign of the chaos abating. Many of the chants and graffiti tags thrown up yesterday called for residents to join a planned city-wide strike tomorrow. Under the terms of the 1997 handover deal with Britain, the city has rights and liberties unseen on the Chinese mainland, including an independent judiciary and freedom of speech. But many say those rights are being curtailed, citing the disappearance into mainland custody of dissident booksellers, the disqualification of prominent politicians and the jailing of pro-democracy protest leaders. Public anger has been compounded by rising inequality and the perception that the city's distinct language and culture are being threatened by ever-closer integration with the Chinese mainland.



# US eyes breakthrough in push for peace with Taliban

AFP, Doha

Washington is hoping for a breakthrough as talks between the US and the Taliban resumed in Doha yesterday in a bid to end 18 years of war in Afghanistan. The US, which invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban in 2001, wants to withdraw thousands of troops and draw down its longest ever war. But it would first seek assurances from the insurgents that they would renounce al-Qaeda and stop other militants like the Islamic State group using the country as a haven. Washington is hoping to strike a peace deal with the Taliban by September 1 -- ahead of Afghan polls due the same month, and US presidential polls due in 2020. US President Donald Trump told reporters at the White House on Friday that "we've made a lot of progress. We're talking." "We are pursuing a peace agreement not a withdrawal agreement, a peace agreement that enables withdrawal," US envoy for

Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted on Friday as he arrived in Doha after talks with Pakistani PM Imran Khan in Islamabad. "Our presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based, and any withdrawal will be conditions-based." In another sign of progress, the Afghan government has formed a negotiating team for separate peace talks with the Taliban that diplomats hope could be held as early as later this month. But, the thorny issues of power-sharing with the Taliban, the role of regional powers including Pakistan and India, and the fate of Ghani's administration also remain unresolved. The United Nations has said that civilian casualty rates across Afghanistan jumped back to record levels last month, following a dip earlier in the year. More than 1,500 civilians were killed or wounded in the conflict in July, the highest monthly toll so far in 2019 and the deadliest single month since May 2017.

**AFGHAN PEACE PUSH**

Negotiators launch final efforts to sign a deal in Doha

At least 1,500 civilians killed and injured in July: UN

# Tourists flee Kashmir after 'terror' warning

AFP, Srinagar

Thousands of tourists and students scrambled to get places on planes and buses leaving Kashmir yesterday after the Indian government warned of the threat of "terror" attacks. Thousands of military reinforcements were arriving in the Himalayan territory, also claimed by Pakistan, where a three-decade old insurgency has left tens of thousands of dead. The Jammu and Kashmir state government said late Friday that tourists should leave "immediately" because of new intelligence about "terror threats" to a major Hindu pilgrimage in the region. Anxious tourists, including some foreigners, flooded the airport at the main city, Srinagar, on Saturday, many without tickets for flights that day. Visitor numbers have been boosted by the Amarnath Yatra pilgrimage, which draws hundreds of thousands of Hindus each year. The pilgrimage has been cancelled because of the scare. A huge security force had been guarding the route even before the alert. A second smaller pilgrimage, the Machail Mata Yatra, in Jammu region was also cancelled. Hundreds of students from outside Kashmir were evacuated in buses. Kashmiri residents formed long lines outside petrol stations, food stores and bank cash machines on Friday night after the alert was announced. But the queues eased yesterday. India's military head in Kashmir, Lieutenant General Kanwal Jeet Singh Dhillon, said Friday that a sniper gun and a mine with Pakistani markings had been found on the route of the Amarnath Yatra. "This proves Pakistani attempts to attack the Yatra," said Singh, who has 500,000 forces in Kashmir battling the insurgency.



Protesters hold up placards reading "No (Japan)" during a rally against Japan's decision to remove South Korea from a so-called "white list" of favoured export partners, near the Japanese embassy in Seoul, yesterday. The banners read "Condemn Abe regime. Make an official apology to victims of wartime forced labor".

PHOTO: AFP

## Sudan rivals reach final deal

Protest leaders yesterday reached "full agreement" with Sudan's ruling generals on a hard-won constitutional declaration, the African Union said, paving the way for a promised transition to civilian rule. Thousands of jubilant Sudanese took to the streets of the capital Khartoum when the deal was announced before dawn to celebrate the prospect of a civilian government. The declaration builds on a landmark power-sharing deal signed on July 17 and provides for a joint civilian-military ruling body to oversee the formation of a transitional civilian government and parliament to govern for a three-year transition period. The deal is the fruit of difficult negotiations between the leaders of the mass protests which erupted last December against the three-decade rule of president Omar al-Bashir and the generals who eventually ousted him in a palace coup in April.

## Majority of House Democrats favor Trump impeachment

A majority of Democrats in the US House of Representatives now favor launching impeachment proceedings against Republican President Donald Trump, after a California lawmaker on Friday became the 118th Democrat to call for the process to begin. The Democrats have a majority of 235 members in the House of Representatives. Support for an impeachment inquiry has jumped by more than two dozen Democrats since former Special Counsel Robert Mueller testified on July 24 about his probe of Trump and Russian interference in the 2016 election. But the total of 118 is still far short of the 218 House votes needed to approve an impeachment resolution.

## India deports Maldives ex-vice president



India yesterday deported former Maldives vice president Ahmed Adeeb, who faces attempted murder and corruption charges at home, after he tried to enter the country on a tugboat, officials said. Adeeb arrived at the southern port of Tuticorin on Thursday in the boat and was detained for attempting an unauthorised entry without a passport. Adeeb was released from a Maldives jail in May after a court quashed a conviction for attempting to kill then-president Abdulla Yameen in 2015. But he is due to face a new trial over the case and is also under investigation for corruption dating back to when he was deputy to Yameen, who was defeated in an election last year. SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# Murky world of international shipping

CNN ONLINE

A British-flagged ship owned by a Swedish company was seized by Iran last week. Caught in the middle are 23 seamen who have nothing to do with any of the three countries. The current crisis in the Strait of Hormuz has put a spotlight on the murky world of international shipping, where shipowners can register and re-register their vessels within minutes, turning their crews into pawns in a game of diplomatic chess. "If you've got a credit card, and you've got 15 minutes, you can re-register your ship under any flag you want," said Michael Roe, a professor of maritime and logistics policy at the University of Plymouth. Under marine laws, every merchant ship has to be registered with one country. While the UN Convention on the High Seas says a vessel should have "a genuine" link with its flag state, current rules allow ships to sail under almost any flag regardless of their ownership, as long as they pay the registration fee. This is known in the shipping industry as a "flag of convenience." That roughly 40% of the global fleet is registered in Panama, Liberia and the Marshall Islands -- three countries that together own just 169 ships -- shows how common the practice is. Registration decisions are mostly driven by commercial reasons.



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"One way to reduce costs is to choose a flag like Mongolia," Roe said. "It's got no coast, no ports, no real direct relevance to shipping, but it offers a flag that's cheap and low standards, therefore it is good for shipowners." According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 265 vessels with a total cargo capacity of 664 million tons are sailing under the Mongolian flag.

It works the other way too. Greece, a shipping superpower that owns the largest fleet in the world, is sailing most of its ships under a foreign flag, because shipowners want to avoid Greece's high tax rates. But the flag decision can have a huge impact on crews. Stena Impero, the Swedish-owned tanker that was seized in Iran last week, was almost certainly targeted because it was flying the British flag. Iran captured the vessel as a tit-for-tat after its own tanker was detained in Gibraltar because it was carrying Iranian oil to Syria in breach of EU sanctions. The crew aboard Stena Impero comes from India, the Philippines, Russia and Latvia. It's a fairly typical makeup: India, Russia and the Philippines are among the top five countries with the highest numbers of seafarers. International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF) has been

campaigning against flags of convenience for decades, saying the practice puts crews at risk of exploitation. When a ship registers with a country, it assumes its nationality and becomes governed by that state's laws. In return, the country is theoretically responsible for the vessel and its crew regardless of their nationalities. But David Heindel, the chair of the seafarers section at ITWF, said seafarers sometimes find it difficult to get help from their vessel's flag state if they are not its citizens. That is especially true when the flag belongs to a developing country with little diplomatic power and no real labor protections. At the same time, Heindel said, the diplomatic missions of the seafarers' own countries may not be able to help either. It may be their citizens who are involved, but they have no power over the vessels.