

NEWS IN brief

DR Congo tests 12 more patients for Ebola

AFP, Goma
Twelve people were ordered to undergo testing for possible Ebola infection in Goma in DR Congo on Saturday, only days after three patients in the densely populated city tested positive for the disease, the country's presidency said. "A total of 12 people from various centres on the outskirts (of Goma) are undergoing testing after the response team triggered the alert protocol," it said in a statement. Six others suspected of carrying the virus were discharged after testing negative on Friday.

Millions hit by power blackout in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta
Tens of millions of people on Indonesia's heavily populated Java island were affected by a widespread electricity outage yesterday after the state utility PLN reported disruptions at several power plants. The shutdown plunged buildings in the sprawling capital Jakarta into darkness and forced the temporary closure of its new mass rapid transit system. Passengers were safely evacuated from several MRT carriages when the power went out.

Death toll in Philippine ferry accidents rises to 31

REUTERS, Manila
The death toll from the capsize of three Philippine ferries in bad weather rose to 31 yesterday as rescuers found more bodies, a coast guard official said. The motorised, wooden-hulled boats were carrying a total 96 passengers and crew when harsh weather conditions caused the vessels to overturn off the central island of Guimaras and Iloilo provinces on Saturday. The search continues for three more people still missing.



(From left, clockwise) Mourners take part in a vigil at El Paso High School after a mass shooting at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas, on Saturday; this CCTV image shows the gunman identified as Patrick Crusius, 21 years old, as he enters the Cielo Vista Walmart store; and officials investigate the scene after a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, hours after the El Paso attack. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

RECENT US MASS SHOOTINGS

Here are some of the recent mass shootings in the US:

VEGAS CONCERT (58 KILLED): From his hotel, a 64-year-old retired accountant shoots down on a crowd attending an outdoor country music concert on October 1, 2017, killing 58 people and wounding around 550 before committing suicide. It is the worst mass shooting in modern US history.

FLORIDA CLUB (49 KILLED): A heavily armed gunman opens fire inside a gay nightclub in the city of Orlando on June 12, 2016, killing 49 people. The attacker is killed in a shootout with police. IS claimed responsibility.

SANDY HOOK (26 KILLED): A 20-year-old man with a history of mental health issues kills his mother in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012 before blasting his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School and shooting dead 20 children and six adults. He commits suicide.

TEXAS CHURCH (25 KILLED): A 26-year-old man who was court-martialed while in the Air Force shoots dead 25 worshippers during Sunday services and wounds at least 20 others at a Baptist church in the small rural community of Sutherland Springs outside San Antonio, Texas, on November 5, 2017. Shooter commits suicide.

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL (17 KILLED): A 19-year-old former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who was expelled for disciplinary reasons returns to the school in Parkland, Florida, and opens fire on February 14, 2018, killing 14 students and three adult staff members.

CALIFORNIA OFFICE PARTY (14 DEAD): A radicalized Muslim couple storm a Christmas office party at a social services center in San Bernardino in December 2015 and gun down 14 people, wounding 22 others. They are shot dead by police.

SYNAGOGUE IN PITTSBURGH (11 DEAD): On October 27, 2018, a 46-year-old gunman bursts into the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh during Shabbat services, killing eleven people. He is indicted on 29 counts, some of which carry the death penalty. SOURCE: AFP

Indo-Pak tensions flare again

Arch-rivals bicker over border clashes as panic grips Kashmir

AGENCIES

Fears of an impending curfew in the disputed region of Kashmir ratcheted up tensions yesterday, as nuclear rivals India and Pakistan traded accusations of military clashes at the de facto border.

Kashmir has surged back into the spotlight in recent days, just months after a deadly Indian attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy claimed by a Pakistan-based group sparked cross-border airstrikes.

The nuclear-armed rivals have controlled parts of the Himalayan region since the end of British colonial rule in the subcontinent in 1947.

The recent spate of tensions started last weekend after New Delhi deployed at least 10,000 troops, with media reports of a further 25,000 ordered to the region.

The government has introduced other security measures -- including a call to stock up food and fuel -- over terror threat claims.

The measures have sparked growing panic among residents with long queues outside petrol stations, food stores and cash machines. Most petrol stations have reportedly run dry.

Authorities could impose an indefinite curfew on residents as early as Sunday

India claims to foil a major infiltration bid by a Pakistani team of army regulars and militants in Kashmir; 5-7 infiltrators killed

Imran Khan summons NSC meet as Pak army alleges India using cluster bombs on civilian in PoK

Locals in Kashmir fear troops buildup may be linked to scrapping Kashmir's special status



yesterday, a police official told AFP.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have traded tit-for-tat accusations of attacks across the Line of Control, the de facto border dividing Kashmir.

The Indian army yesterday said it had foiled an attempt by a Pakistani team of army regulars and militants to cross the Line of Control, killing "five to seven" attackers.

Pakistan denied the claims, describing them as "baseless" as it accused India of using cluster bombs against civilians, killing two people -- including a four-year-old boy -- and critically injuring 11 others. New Delhi has denied the charge.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan

yesterday accused India of taking "new aggressive actions", saying it could "blow up into a regional crisis".

He called for a meeting of the country's national security committee to review the situation in Kashmir.

Pakistan has accused India of using cluster bombs on civilians in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The use of cluster bombs on the Neelum Valley over the past few days has caused multiple fatalities and injuries to several others, including minor children, Dawn reported quoting Pakistan military sources.

Kashmir is a popular tourist destination for foreigners and Indians, who visit the picturesque valley in their tens of thousands

every year.

But tourists and students have been scrambling to leave since the government said they should depart "immediately", amid new intelligence about "terror threats" to a major Hindu pilgrimage in the region.

While the Indian military and the state government have highlighted the security risk, Kashmiri and opposition politicians in New Delhi are concerned the extra troops were deployed for other reasons.

There are fears PM Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government could carry out a threat to scrap the region's special status under the constitution.

Local political leaders warn that cancelling constitutionally guaranteed rights -- which mean only state domiciles can buy land in the region -- could spark unrest in the Muslim-majority state.

Media reports said Modi's close aide, Home Minister Amit Shah, was meeting with top officials Sunday and was reportedly planning a trip to the region.

Rebel groups have for decades fought against Indian soldiers deployed in the part of Kashmir controlled by New Delhi, seeking the territory's merger with Pakistan or outright independence.

Khmer Rouge 'brother number two' dies

Khmer Rouge 'brother number two' Nuon Chea died yesterday aged 93, a spokesman for the Cambodia tribunal where he was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity told AFP. The cause of his death was not given. The reign of terror led by "Brother Number 1" Pol Pot left some two million Cambodians dead from overwork, starvation and mass executions from 1975 to 1979. But Nuon Chea, considered the Khmer Rouge's chief ideologue, was not arrested until 2007. He and other senior members of the ultra-Maoist group were put on trial at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. The UN-backed court sentenced him to life in prison last year after he was found guilty of genocide against the ethnic Vietnamese and Cham Muslim minority group. Pol Pot passed away in 1998 without facing court.



Sudan generals, protest camp sign accord

Sudan's army rulers and protest leaders yesterday signed a hard-won constitutional declaration that paves the way for a promised transition to civilian rule following more than seven months of often deadly street rallies. The agreement, signed at a ceremony in Khartoum, builds on a landmark July 17 power-sharing deal 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. Yesterday's accord was the result of difficult negotiations between the leaders of mass protests which erupted last December against Omar al-Bashir's three-decade rule and the generals who eventually ousted him in April.

US, Taliban push for peace in day 2 of talks

The US and the Taliban were thrashing out elements of a deal to bring a close to Afghanistan's 18-year conflict at the second day of renewed talks in Doha yesterday. The US, which invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban in 2001, wants to withdraw thousands of troops and turn the page on its longest ever war. But it would first seek assurances from the insurgents that they will renounce al-Qaeda ties and stop other militants like the Islamic State group using the country as a haven. The talks, now in their eighth round, began on Saturday with no end date issued publicly. 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 elections due in 2020.

SOURCE: AFP

Iran seizes third foreign ship in less than a month

AFP, Tehran

Iran has seized a foreign tanker in the Gulf, state media said yesterday, in what would be the third such seizure in a month amid heightened tensions with its foe the United States.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps "seized this ship around Farsi Island which was carrying around 700,000 litres of smuggled fuel", said a Guards statement quoted by the official news agency IRNA.

Seven foreign crew were arrested in the operation carried out on Wednesday night, said Fars news agency, which is considered close to the Guards.

Tensions between arch-enemies Iran and the US have soared this year after Washington stepped up its campaign of "maximum pressure" against Tehran.

Ships have been attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized since May, a year after the United States withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and began reimposing biting sanctions against the country. At the height of the crisis, US President Donald Trump called off air strikes against Iran at the last minute in June after the Islamic republic's forces shot down a US drone.

The seizure of the latest tanker would be the third by Iran in less than a month in Gulf waters -- a conduit for much of the world's crude oil.

On July 18, the Guards said they had detained the Panama-flagged for MT Riah for alleged fuel smuggling. And a day later, they announced they had impounded the British-flagged Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz for breaking "international maritime rules".

The identity of the latest vessel seized and the nationality of its crew had not yet been revealed yesterday.



Protesters gather amid tear gas, outside of a police station in the Wong Tai Sin district of Hong Kong early yesterday, after arrested protesters were taken to the station in a police van. Riot police fired tear gas at pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong yesterday evening during a second consecutive night of clashes, as China delivered fresh warnings over the unrest battering the city.

PHOTO: AFP

China destabilising Indo-Pacific

Says Pentagon chief, accuses Beijing of predatory economics

REUTERS, Sydney

China is destabilising the Indo-Pacific, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday, charging Beijing with predatory economics, intellectual property theft and "weaponising the global commons".

The comments by Esper on his first overseas trip as US defence secretary threaten to inflame already heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing as they wage an escalating trade war.

China's increasing assertiveness, especially in the energy-rich South China Sea, has raised concerns within the region and the United States is challenging Chinese maritime hegemony and seeking stronger ties with nations pushing back against Beijing.

"We firmly believe no one nation can or should dominate the Indo-Pacific and we are working alongside our allies to address the region's pressing security needs," Esper told reporters in Sydney.

"We also stand firmly against a disturbing pattern of aggressive behaviour, destabilising behaviour from China. This includes weaponising the global commons, using predatory economics and debt for sovereignty deals,

and promoting state-sponsored theft of other nations' intellectual property."

China has unnerved the region and angered US by installing military equipment and other facilities on artificial islands it has made in the disputed South China Sea.

China claims large parts of the South China Sea through which roughly \$3.4 trillion in shipping passes each year. Countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam contest the territorial claims.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday decried "decades of bad behaviour" from China that have hampered free trade, laying out a case at a Southeast Asian forum in Bangkok for Washington's trade war with Beijing.

US President Donald Trump on Thursday slapped 10% tariffs on \$300 billion in Chinese imports, stunning financial markets and ending a month-long trade war truce. China vowed on Friday to fight back.

Both Esper and Pompeo met with their Australian counterparts in Sydney yesterday at an annual security forum where the United States and Australia pledged to strengthen opposition to Chinese activities in the Pacific.



After NRC, India to document 'usual residents' across country

NDTV ONLINE

While the National Register of Citizen (NRC) in Assam is still mired in controversy, the Indian government has decided to go for a country-wide documentation of persons "usually residing" in India.

"In pursuance of sub-rule (4) of rule 3 of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003, the central government hereby decides to prepare and update the Population Register," said a notification issued by Vivek Joshi, registrar general of Citizen Registration and Census Commissioner of India.

The notification also said, "...the field work for house-to-house enumeration throughout the country except Assam for collection of information relating to all persons who are usually residing within the jurisdiction of local registrar shall be undertaken between the April 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020."

The National Population Register (NPR) is likely to be the basis for preparing the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC), a pan-India version of Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC), a Home Ministry official said.

For the purpose of NPR, a "usual resident" is defined as a person who has resided in a local area for past six months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months or more.

It is mandatory for every "usual resident" of India to register in the NPR. The reason for excluding Assam is because of the ongoing exercise of NRC in the state.

The final draft NRC published in Assam on July 30 last year had sparked a major controversy over the exclusion of 40.7 lakh people from it.