

Canary Islands fire  
out of control

AFP, Montaña Alta

A wildfire raged out of control on the Spanish island of Gran Canaria yesterday, forcing more evacuations as flames in some parts rose so high even water-dropping planes were unable to operate, authorities said. The fire has forced the evacuation of several villages, which according to the census have a combined population of 8,000, a spokeswoman for emergency services said.

Polish rescuers search  
for two trapped cavers

AFP, Warsaw

Polish rescuers said yesterday they are still searching for two men who became trapped in a mountain cave last week when their corridor to the outside was flooded with water. The men had entered the Wielka Snieżna limestone cave in the Tatras mountains of southern Poland on Thursday along with four other spelunkers, who resurfaced and raised the alarm after losing contact with the pair on Saturday. Rescuers used explosives to try to clear a path towards the men trapped in the cave, which is the country's deepest and longest.

19 killed in Uganda  
fuel truck blast

AFP, Kampala

Nineteen people died when a fuel truck barrelled into other vehicles in a busy town in western Uganda and exploded, police said yesterday. The blast occurred Sunday evening in the Kyambura trading centre, a mountainous area near the Queen Elizabeth National Park. "Ten people died instantly when the fuel truck lost control and hit three other vehicles, leading to multiple explosions that also burned 25 small shops," said regional police spokesman Martial Tumusiime.

Trump confirms interest in  
buying Greenland

US President Donald Trump on Sunday confirmed his interest in buying Greenland, but said it was not a priority for his administration. "It's something we talked about," Trump told reporters. "The concept came up and I said certainly, strategically it's interesting and we'd be interested, but we'll talk to (Denmark) a little bit," he said, stressing that it was "not number one on the burner" for the government. The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday that Trump had expressed interest in the self-governing part of Denmark asking advisors if it would be possible for the US to acquire the territory.

Malaysia ex-PM Najib's 1MDB  
trial postponed



A Malaysian court yesterday postponed for a week the biggest of five trials linked to a multi-billion-dollar scam at state fund 1MDB and allegedly involving former prime minister Najib Razak. Najib, who lost a general election last year, has been hit with 42 criminal charges of graft and money laundering at 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and other state entities. He has pleaded not guilty and says the charges are politically motivated. The hearing will now begin next Monday.

UP woman burnt alive for  
triple talaq complaint

A 22-year-old woman was allegedly burnt to death by her husband and in-laws in Uttar Pradesh's Shravasti district on Friday evening, after she tried lodging a police complaint over an attempt to divorce her using now the banned 'triple talaq' practice. Shockingly, local police allegedly tried to get the couple to compromise and settle their differences instead of taking legal action. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 was passed by the Lok Sabha on July 25 and the Rajya Sabha five days later.

Malaysia quizzes Indian  
Islamic preacher

Malaysian police yesterday questioned a controversial Indian Islamic preacher for allegedly making insensitive remarks about race in the multi-ethnic country, as pressure mounts on authorities to kick him out. Zakir Naik, a radical television preacher who has called the 9/11 attacks an "inside job", left India in 2016 and moved to largely Muslim Malaysia, where he was granted permanent residency. He is wanted in India for inciting extremism and money laundering, and New Delhi last year asked Malaysia to extradite him, according to reports -- a request that was rejected. Calls are now mounting for action after Naik said Hindus in Malaysia have "100 times" more rights than India's Muslim minority, and suggested Chinese Malaysians should be expelled before he was.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, NDTV



Smoke billows above buildings during a reported air strike by pro-regime forces near the town of Hish in Syria's Idlib province yesterday. Inset, A Turkish military convoy crossed into northwest Syria yesterday, heading towards a key town where regime forces are waging fierce battles with jihadists and rebels. Turkey alleges regime's airstrike on its convoy killed three civilians.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran warns US not  
to seize its tanker

REUTERS, Dubai

An Iranian tanker sailed through the Mediterranean towards Greece yesterday after it was released from detention off Gibraltar, and Tehran said that any at US move to seize the vessel again would have "heavy consequences".

The Grace 1, renamed the Adrian Darya 1, left anchorage off Gibraltar about 11 pm (2100 GMT) on Sunday. Refinitiv ship tracking data showed yesterday that the vessel was heading to Kalamata in Greece and was scheduled to arrive next Sunday at 0000 GMT.

The seizure of the tanker by British Royal Marines near Gibraltar in July 4 on suspicion of carrying oil to Syria in violation of European Union sanctions led to a weeks-long stand-off between Tehran and the West. It also heightened tensions on international oil shipping routes through the Gulf.

Gibraltar, a British overseas territory, lifted the detention order on Thursday but the next day a federal court in Washington issued a warrant for the seizure of the tanker, the oil it carries and nearly \$1 million.

Gibraltar said on Sunday it could not comply with that request because it was bound by EU law. Washington wanted to detain the tanker on the grounds that it had links to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which it has designated a terrorist organisation.

"We are happy this ordeal has ended and I hope this will lead to less escalation," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said while visiting Finland.

Modi speaks to Trump

Says extreme rhetoric by certain leaders in the region not conducive to peace

Toi, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday held a telephonic conversation with US President Donald Trump during which he made an indirect reference to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's extreme rhetoric against India, saying such incitement to anti-India violence was not conducive to peace.

In a 30-minute telephonic conversation, that was marked by warmth and cordiality, PM Modi and Trump discussed several bilateral and regional matters.

Modi highlighted the importance of creating an environment free of terror and violence and eschewing cross-border terrorism without exception.

On Friday, Trump conveyed the importance of India and Pakistan reducing tensions through bilateral dialogue during a phone call with Prime Minister Imran Khan, the White House said. The White House said Trump spoke with Khan to

"discuss regional developments".

During yesterday's conversation, Modi reiterated India's commitment to cooperate with anyone who followed this path in fighting poverty, illiteracy and disease.

Modi recalled his meeting with President Trump in Japan's Osaka on the margins of G-20 summit in end-June earlier this year.

Referring to their bilateral discussions in Osaka, the Prime Minister expressed hope that the commerce minister of India and the US trade representative would meet at an early date to discuss bilateral trade prospects for mutual benefit.

He reiterated India's longstanding and unwavering commitment to work for united, secure, democratic and truly independent Afghanistan.

The prime minister also stated that he appreciated remaining in regular touch with President Donald Trump.



A man carries a wounded person to the hospital after a blast in Jalalabad, Afghanistan yesterday. A series of bombings struck restaurants and public squares in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, wounding at least 34 people, officials said, as the country marked the 100th anniversary of its independence.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump hails 'very good'  
discussions with Taliban

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Sunday hailed progress in negotiations on an Afghanistan peace deal, saying that talks with both the Taliban and the Afghan government are going well.

But while Trump said the United States has things "under control," a massive bombing in Kabul highlighted the rampant violence still plaguing Afghanistan and the major challenges it would face even if an agreement is reached.

"We're having very good discussions with the Taliban. We're having very good discussions with the Afghan government," Trump told reporters.

Expectations are rising for a deal in which the United States would start withdrawing its soldiers from Afghanistan after nearly two decades of war that has ground into a stalemate.

"We've really got it down to probably 13,000 people and we'll be bringing it down a little bit more and then we'll decide whether or not we'll be staying longer or not," Trump said.

"We have things under control very well with

the small force. We can probably make it a little bit smaller and then we'll decide," he said, adding: "It'll depend on the Taliban, it'll depend on the Afghan government."

A US-Taliban agreement would not by itself bring an end to Afghanistan's war, as the insurgents would still need to make a deal with the Washington-backed government in Kabul.

Trump reiterated Sunday that the United States would maintain an intelligence presence in the country even if it withdraws troops, in order to guard against potential militant threats.

"I think it's very important that we continue intelligence there in all cases, because it is somewhat of a nest for hitting us," the president said.

Washington is keen to end its involvement in Afghanistan, where it has spent more than \$1 trillion and has said since the start of his presidency that he wants troops out. In return, the Taliban would commit to various security guarantees, including that the Islamist hardliners who long harbored Al-Qaeda would not allow Afghanistan to become a jihadist safe haven -- but any such promise would be tough to keep.

AFGHAN PEACE DEAL



Sri Lanka names war  
veteran as army chief  
US critical of decision

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's President yesterday named war veteran Shavendra Silva as its army chief, drawing sharp criticism from the United States over the appointment of an officer who has been accused of human rights violations.

Silva, 55, is credited with successfully leading an army division against dissident Tamil Tigers in the final phases of the island nation's 26-year-long civil war.

His victory, however, was highly controversial.

A United Nations panel has accused Silva's unit of shooting at unarmed rebels in the final week of the war which ended in 2009.

Silva, who joined the army in 1984 and was its chief of staff since January, has denied the accusations.

Washington expressed its disapproval of Silva's appointment in a strongly-worded statement.

"The allegations of gross human rights violations against him, documented by the United Nations and other organizations, are serious and credible," the US Embassy in Colombo said in a statement.

"This appointment undermines Sri Lanka's international reputation and its commitments to promote justice and accountability, especially at a time when the need for reconciliation and social unity is paramount."

Silva was named head of the army after the previous chief Mahesh Senanayake's term ended on Sunday.

Sudan's Bashir  
got \$90m from  
Saudi royals

Investigator  
tells court

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's deposed military ruler Omar al-Bashir has admitted to receiving \$90 million in cash from Saudi royals, an investigator told a Khartoum court yesterday.

Police Brigadier Ahmed Ali said at the opening of Bashir's corruption trial, which an AFP correspondent attended, that the former president told him that the latest payment was "delivered by some of Mohammed bin Salman's envoys".

Bashir, whose military Islamist regime ruled Sudan for 30 years, arrived at the Judicial and Legal Science Institute where the trial is taking place in a huge military convoy.

Inside the courtroom, he was sitting in a metal cage,



unshaven and wearing a white traditional gown.

The former strongman was forced from power on April 11 after months of protests. A transitional constitution meant to guide Sudan towards civilian rule was officially signed on Saturday.

Bashir faces a raft of charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide from the International Criminal Court over his role in the war in Darfur region. However, the jailed leader appeared in court yesterday on charges of receiving and possessing foreign funds illegally.

The police investigator told the court that nearly seven million euros (\$7.8 million) were found at Bashir's residence, as well as smaller amounts in US dollars and Sudanese pounds.

SCRAPPING OF KASHMIR AUTONOMY

Parties may be  
forced to ditch  
separatism

After abrogation of the special status conferred to Jammu & Kashmir by the Constitution, politics in the Valley is set to witness an "unprecedented recalibration" now. While some separatists are mulling over joining mainstream politics, some in the mainstream are on the verge of defecting to rival parties.

Insiders in both separatist and mainstream camps in Srinagar told TOI that after absorbing the initial shock of bifurcation of the state of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union territories and invalidation of Articles 370 and 35A which granted J&K extraordinary privileges, all groups have begun discussions on the future of their politics.

In the last 30 years of violent insurgency and terrorism, while separatists refused to accept the legitimacy of the Indian Constitution and sought secession from India, Kashmir's grand old party National Conference demanded restoration of the pre1953 autonomy J&K enjoyed. The other major political party in the mainstream fold, People's Democratic Party (PDP) pursued soft-separatism with religious symbolism. Smaller Kashmir-centric parties followed similar line of politics even as they aligned with national parties at one point or the other for government formation.

"Now that New Delhi removed all ambiguity about J&K's relationship with the rest of India, everything has changed. We are now like the rest of the country, instead of a special state whose future was uncertain between India and Pakistan... The political agenda of all the regional parties in Kashmir stands irrelevant today," Mudassir, a young political activist aspiring to enter regional politics told TOI in Srinagar.

According to insiders in the Hurriyat, the conglomerate of separatist and Islamist groups, the younger generation among them is keen to join the mainstream. Sources in NC said party president Farooq Abdullah is ready to fight for the restoration of statehood of J&K, which is now a Union territory, but son Omar is reluctant as of now.

With the leadership of the pro-Pakistan banned organization Jamat-e-Islami behind bars, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti is also assessing her options. A politician who worked closely with the Muftis told TOI, "Jamat votes were fundamental to PDP's rise to power in Kashmir. But after the crackdown on separatists and Jamat, PDP is finished. As of today, it seems, the party will break into several factions. Mehbooba had already alienated senior leaders by handing over the reins of the party to her family members during her coalition government with the BJP. Also, very few in the party want to continue with her rabid anti-India politics now. Everyone knows that the old political game is over."

SOURCE: TIMES OF INDIA

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