

NEWSIN
brief

‘I can’t breathe’
US cop fired

AFP, New York

A US police officer was sacked Monday for putting a black man in a banned chokehold just before he died five years ago in a case that fueled “Black Lives Matter” protests. Daniel Pantaleo was fired with immediate effect over the death of 43-year-old Eric Garner during an arrest in July 2014. Garner’s last words – “I can’t breathe,” which he repeated 11 times to Pantaleo – became a rallying cry for the demonstrators.

Iran FM to meet
Macron on Friday

AFP, Tehran

Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is expected to visit Paris and meet with his counterpart and the French President Emmanuel Macron, state news agency IRNA reported yesterday. Zarif is currently on a three-nation tour of Scandinavia and he will also visit China “next week”, according to IRNA.

Duterte to visit Beijing
amid China sea row

AFP, Manila

President Duterte will visit Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping next week to raise their conflicting claims to the South China Sea, as the Filipino leader faces pressure at home to confront Beijing. Duterte heads to China on August 28 and is due to return on September 2.

13 tourists killed in
Laos bus accident

AFP, Bangkok

At least 13 Chinese tourists were killed and dozens injured when their bus skidded off the road and plunged 30 metres into a ravine in Laos. The bus was carrying more than 40 Chinese nationals heading towards the tourist town of Luang Prabang when the accident occurred late on Monday.



A demonstrator tries to protect Peoples Democracy Party's (HDP) deputy Feleknas Uca (C,R) during clashes with Turkish anti riot police in Diyarbakir yesterday. The Turkish government removed three mayors from office on Monday over alleged links to Kurdish militants as Ankara deepened its crackdown on the opposition.

PHOTO: AFP

Italy PM says to resign as
crisis comes to a head

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte yesterday said he would resign, lashing out at far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini for pursuing his own interests by pulling the plug on the government coalition. “I’m ending this government experience here... I will go to the president of the republic (Sergio Mattarella) to inform him of my resignation”, after a Senate debate, Conte said after an almost hour-long speech to the chamber. “It is irresponsible to initiate a government crisis,” Conte said after Salvini began his efforts to bring down the government in the hope of snap elections he hoped would make him premier.



“It shows personal and party interests,” Conte said of the end of the alliance between the anti-migrant League and the anti-establishment Five Star Movement. Conte was speaking following a week of fallout from Salvini’s decision to back out of the alliance on August 8, plunging the eurozone’s third-largest economy into

political turmoil.

After Conte announced his intention to resign, Salvini hit back saying: “Thank you, finally, I would do it all again.”

Salvini “violated the solemn promise he took when the government began that if there were differences they should be discussed in good faith and with loyal collaboration,” Conte said as League senators booed and hissed. “Making citizens vote is the essence of democracy, asking them to vote every year is irresponsible,” Conte added.

The likely end of the 14-month-old government would open the way for Mattarella to begin consultations with political parties, with a range of options available.

A snap election, the forming of a new coalition without holding a new vote and, although unlikely, the continuation of the current government, would all be considered. Salvini’s plan for a snap election -- more than three years early -- had envisioned a vote in October followed by him being crowned as prime minister.

Lam sees way out of crisis

Twitter, Facebook dismantle China campaign to undermine protests

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam yesterday said she hoped a peaceful weekend anti-government protest was the start of efforts to restore calm and that talks with non-violent protesters would provide “a way out” for the Chinese-ruled city.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters rallied peacefully in torrential rain on Sunday in the eleventh week of what have been often violent demonstrations.

“I sincerely hope that this was the beginning of society returning to peace and staying away from violence,” Lam said.

“We will immediately start the work to establish a platform for dialogue. This dialogue, I hope, will be based on a mutual understanding and respect and find a way out for today’s Hong Kong.”

Anger erupted in June over a now-suspended bill that would allow criminal suspects in the former British colony to be extradited to mainland China for trial.

The unrest has been fuelled by broader worries about the erosion of freedoms guaranteed under the “one country, two systems” formula put in place after Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997, including an independent judiciary and the right to protest.

The protests have prompted sharp reactions from Beijing, which has accused foreign countries, including the United States, of fomenting unrest in the territory. China



has also sent clear warning that forceful intervention is possible, with paramilitary forces holding drills in neighbouring Shenzhen.

Twitter Inc and Facebook Inc also said on Monday they had dismantled a state-backed social media campaign originating in mainland China that sought to undermine protests in Hong Kong.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang declined direct comment on the Twitter and Facebook actions, but defended the right of Chinese people to make their voices heard.

The protests are exacting a toll on the city’s economy and tourism, with the Asian financial hub on the verge of its first recession in a decade.

Aside from seeking Lam’s resignation, demonstrators have five demands - complete withdrawal of the extradition bill, a halt to descriptions of the protests as “rioting”, a waiver of charges against those arrested, an independent inquiry and resumption of political reform.

“The bill is dead,” Lam told yesterday’s news briefing. “There is no plan to revive the bill.”

Police have been criticised for using increasingly aggressive tactics to break up demonstrations but there was a minimal police presence on Sunday and no arrests were made. More than 700 people have been arrested since June.

Lam said the police watchdog had set up a task force to investigate complaints.

JAPAN’S WWII ATROCITIES

Emperor ‘prevented from voicing remorse’ after war

AFP, Tokyo

Japan’s wartime emperor Hirohito wanted to express his regret and remorse shortly after World War II but the prime minister at the time stopped him, local media reported yesterday, citing newly disclosed documents.

The 18 notebooks, written by Michiji Tajima, a top official at the Imperial Household Agency, featured dialogue between him and Hirohito between 1949 and 1953.

According to the documents, the emperor said in 1952: “No matter what, I really think I need to include the word remorse” in his planned speech to mark Japan’s regaining of its independence later that year.

The emperor was also cited as saying: “For myself, I do feel great remorse. I really want to add the phrase -- reflection on the past and self-discipline for the future -- even if the words can be changed.”

But then prime minister Shigeru Yoshida opposed the emperor’s plan to publicly express regret and remorse, telling Tajima: “There is a danger that people will say he was responsible for starting the war.”

The phrases of regret and remorse were eventually deleted from the speech delivered by Hirohito to celebrate the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty.

Hirohito, who died in 1989, is the grandfather of Emperor Naruhito, 59, who ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne in May from his father Akihito.

Emperor Hirohito was once worshipped as a living demigod and served as Japan’s commander-in-chief during its march across Asia in the 1930s and 1940s.

Hirohito’s speech to surrender in the war was broadcast on radio on August 15, 1945, days after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Kashmiri refugees in Pakistan-administered Kashmir shout anti-Indian slogans during a protest in Muzaffarabad, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Johnson Brexit letter offers no alternatives to Irish backstop

Says EU as UK PM seeks deal without the clause

AFP, Brussels

EU yesterday rejected British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s demand to scrap the Irish border backstop plan to achieve a Brexit deal, saying he had offered no workable alternative.

Johnson wrote to EU Council President Donald Tusk on Monday to insist that Britain could not accept what he called the “anti-democratic” backstop, a mechanism to avoid border checks between EU-member Ireland and British-ruled Northern Ireland.

Since taking office last month, Johnson has been adamant Britain will leave the EU on October 31 come what may and has stepped up preparations for a chaotic “no deal” departure that would cause major economic disruption.

But the European Commission, the EU executive which has led Brexit negotiations with London, dismissed the proposal in Johnson’s letter that the backstop could be replaced with a “commitment” to find

“alternative arrangements.”

“The letter does not provide a legal operational solution to prevent the return of a hard border on the island of Ireland,” commission spokeswoman Natasha Bertaud told reporters.

“It does not set out what any alternative arrangements could be, and in fact it recognises there is no guarantee that such arrangements will be in place by the end of the transitional period.”

Brussels insists that the backstop -- which would keep the UK in EU customs arrangements to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland -- is essential to preserve the integrity of European trade and to avoid risking a return of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Critics say the backstop -- part of the Brexit divorce deal struck between the EU and Johnson’s predecessor Theresa May would keep Britain tied to EU rules potentially indefinitely.



IS reviving in Syria

Says China, urges int’l spotlight on the issue; anti-Assad fighters withdraw from key area

AFP, Geneva

China’s Syria envoy yesterday said that “terrorist organisations” including the Islamic State group are being revived in the war-ravaged country, urging the international community not to ignore the “early warning” signs.

Xie Xiaoyan, Beijing’s pointman for the Syrian conflict, made the comments after meeting in Geneva with the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen.

“There is now a danger of terrorist organisations like ISIS being revived,” Xie told reporters, using another acronym for IS. “The international community should pay attention.”

IS overran large parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014, proclaiming a “caliphate” there, but offensives in both countries reclaimed the territory.

Xie’s Geneva visit came as concern mounts over a possible major offensive by President Bashar al-Assad’s forces on Idlib, a jihadist-run area in the northwest which is the last major opposition stronghold in Syria.

The UN has warned that an assault on Idlib

could trigger a humanitarian catastrophe.

On the ground, jihadists and allied rebels withdrew from the town of Khan Sheikhun in northwestern Syria yesterday.

The town of Khan Sheikhun on the region’s southern edge has been a key goal for the government as it lies on the main highway through Idlib province connecting the capital Damascus with second city Aleppo.

Idlib has for several years served as a reception zone for those escaping government advances elsewhere in the country, who now number in their hundreds of thousands. Today they have nowhere to run in case of a full assault on Idlib.

Asked about Beijing’s position on a prospective of such an assault and the humanitarian fallout, Xie described the issue as “very complicated”.

“We all know that this is the last stronghold of some of the terrorist organisations... so this is an issue that needs to be dealt with,” he said.

“The fight against terrorism is not finished yet.” Since January, Idlib has been administered by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, which is led by jihadists from Syria’s former al-Qaeda affiliate.

India’s Moon probe enters lunar orbit

India’s Chandrayaan 2 spacecraft entered lunar orbit yesterday, executing one of the trickiest manoeuvres on its historic mission to the Moon. After four weeks in space, the craft completed its Lunar Orbit Insertion as planned, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said in a statement. India is seeking to become just the fourth nation after Russia, the United States and China to land a spacecraft on the Moon. If the rest of the mission goes to plan, the Indian probe will land on the lunar South Pole on September 7. To enter the final orbit over the lunar poles, Chandrayaan 2 will undergo four more similar manoeuvres, with the next scheduled for Wednesday. Chandrayaan 2 lifted off from India’s spaceport at Sriharikota in southern Andhra Pradesh state on July 22.

‘Save our oceans,’ Oscar winner Bardem tells UN

Oscar-winning actor Javier Bardem made an impassioned plea at the United Nations to save the world’s oceans Monday. The Spaniard, a keen environmental activist, called on countries to agree to a treaty that would protect at least 30 percent of seas by 2030. “We just can’t afford to get it wrong,” he told an intergovernmental meeting at the UN’s headquarters in New York. Bardem spoke as a representative of Greenpeace, which is campaigning for the Global Ocean Treaty being discussed at the UN. The environmental group says the UN’s 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea does not go far enough to protect the planet’s oceans.

Call grows in Malaysia to kick Zakir Naik out



A controversial Indian Islamic preacher yesterday apologised for making comments about race in multi-ethnic Malaysia which sparked calls for his expulsion, a day after being questioned by police. Zakir Naik, a radical television preacher, 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 reportedly asked Malaysia to extradite him -- a request that was rejected. Calls have escalated for Naik to be kicked out after he said Hindus in Malaysia have “100 times” more rights than India’s Muslim minority, and suggested Chinese Malaysians should be expelled. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said Naik crossed the line and several cabinet ministers have called for him to be kicked out, while police have banned him from giving public talks anywhere in Malaysia, state news agency Bernama reported.

SOURCE: AFP