

NEWSIN brief

DR Congo Ebola death toll passes 2,000

The Ebola outbreak showed no signs of easing in DR Congo yesterday on the eve of the UN chief's visit, with the death toll from the highly contagious virus crossing 2,000 and a new fatality in neighbouring Uganda. The latest casualty in Uganda was a nine-year-old girl from the Democratic Republic of Congo, reviving fears that the virus could cross the porous borders of the central African country, where it erupted in August last year.

Dorian gains strength as Florida braces for hit

Hurricane Dorian was expected to strengthen into a dangerous Category 3 storm yesterday with winds of at least 111 mph (178 km/h) as it heads towards Florida's Atlantic coast. Dorian is forecast to swell later into a powerful Category 4 storm with violent winds topping 130 mph (210 km/h) before it makes landfall on Labor Day. The entire state of Florida is under a declaration of emergency and Governor Ron DeSantis activated 2,500 National Guard troops with another 1,500 on standby.

Iran tanker headed to Lebanon: Turkey

An Iranian tanker released after being detained for six weeks by the British overseas territory of Gibraltar is now headed for Lebanon, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said yesterday. "This tanker is not heading actually to Iskenderun (in Turkey), this tanker is heading to Lebanon," Cavusoglu said during a visit to Oslo, referring to the Adrian Darya 1 vessel. The ship was suspected of transporting crude oil to Syria, in violation of European sanctions against the country, and the US has called for it to be seized.



Indian security personnel patrol on a bridge ahead of the publication of the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) at Kachari Para village, in Hojai district, northeastern state of Assam, India, yesterday. Inset, the photo shows a road sign for a new detention centre being built for people who are not included in the NRC in Kadamtola Gopalpur village, in Goalpara district, Guwahati.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

FINAL ASSAM NRC LIST

People still being called for hearings

As India is preparing to release the final list of National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam today, families across the state are still making rounds of government offices to claim inclusion in the all-important list. At least four notices issued to persons in Biswanath district in north Assam show that their hearing was slotted for Thursday. These four notices, copies of which were accessed by TOI, mentions discrepancies in the FT or 'family tree' as the reason for the summons. One notice was issued to Achar Ali, a resident of Japariguri village in Panibharal gram panchayat of the district. He was called for a hearing at 11:00 am on Thursday. The others were issued to residents of Kumalia and Jarabari gram panchayats in the same district. It is not immediately clear if these people turned up for the hearings. Not just Biswanath, families in several parts of Assam have made trips to government offices this week—the last before the publication of the NRC. Tamej Ali, a former elected member of No. 2 Hatishola Bhalukabari Gaon Panchayat in Goraimari revenue circle, attended his last hearing as late as Monday. He was included in the final draft NRC published last year, along with his two sons and one daughter, but his wife — a native of Goraimari area according to her NRC application — failed to make the cut. But, to his utter puzzlement, all four members who figured in the draft NRC were summoned for reverification hearings one after the other.

Greece feels strain of migrant arrivals

Over 500 arrived overnight

More than 500 migrants arrived overnight on the Greek island of Lesbos, authorities and NGOs said yesterday, as Greece complained that the number of new arrivals is surging. Thirteen boats carrying 540 people, including 240 children, arrived late Thursday from nearby Turkey, Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, said. They were taken to the island's already densely overcrowded Moria migrant camp, where "nearly 11,000 people are crowded together in a camp whose capacity is actually only for 3,000," MSF said. According to a Greek diplomatic source, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias summoned Turkey's ambassador in Athens to express "his great displeasure" at the recent increase in the number of arrivals from Turkey. Dendias reminded the Turkish envoy of Ankara's obligations under a 2016 deal with the EU aimed at reducing the flow of asylum seekers to Europe, the source said. Athens had also informed Brussels about the latest increase in numbers, it added. The Greek islands "have reached their limits," Alexandros Konstantinou, a lawyer for the NGO, Greek Council for Refugees, told AFP. According to the International Organization for Migration, 3,250 arrivals were registered on the five islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos during the first two weeks of August, compared with 5,520 in the whole of July and 2,079 in January.

Pak observes Kashmir Hour

Tens of thousands hold solidarity protests as PM Imran Khan vows befitting reply to India until Kashmiris get freedom

who Pakistan says are oppressed by the Indian government and its security forces, reported Reuters. India stripped its part of Kashmir of a special status on August 5, blocking the right of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir to frame its own laws and allowing non-residents to buy property there. The government said the reform would facilitate Kashmir's development, to the benefit of all. But the decision by the Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi infuriated many residents of the region. "I want to tell you, Narendra Modi, that we will give a befitting response. Our armed forces are ready," Khan told the rally. Pakistan has sought the support of the United States, former colonial power Britain and others to press India over Kashmir. But India says it is an internal matter and that it would only hold talks with Pakistan if it stops supporting militants operating from its soil. Meanwhile, fresh restrictions were imposed in the city and other parts of the Kashmir Valley as a preventive measure ahead of Friday congregational prayers, officials said yesterday. Restrictions under Section 144 of the CrPc were announced on public address system. People have been asked not to venture outside and barricades have been placed. Normal life remained disrupted across the Kashmir Valley for the 26th consecutive day, with markets closed and public transport off the roads. Security forces in Kashmir have been accused of carrying out beatings and torture in the wake of the government's decision to strip the region of its autonomy. The BBC heard from several villagers who said they were beaten with sticks and cables, and given electric shocks. The Indian army has called them "baseless and unsubstantiated". Doctors and health officials are unwilling to speak to journalists about any patients regardless of ailments, but the villagers showed the BBC correspondent injuries alleged to have been inflicted by security forces.

AGENCIES

Cities around Pakistan came to a standstill yesterday as tens of thousands of people poured onto the streets in a government-led demonstration of solidarity with the disputed region of Kashmir, after India revoked its autonomy this month. The Pakistani national anthem and an anthem for Kashmir played across television and radio, while traffic came to a standstill, traffic lights were switched off and trains stopped, as part of Prime Minister Imran Khan's campaign to draw global attention to the plight of the divided Himalayan region. "We are with them in their testing times. The message that goes out of here today is that as long as Kashmiris don't get freedom, we will stand with them," Khan told thousands of demonstrators in the capital, Islamabad. The Muslim-majority region has long been a flashpoint between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. Both countries rule parts of Kashmir while claiming it in full. India has battled separatist militants in its part of Kashmir since the late 1980s, accusing Muslim Pakistan of supporting the insurgents. Pakistan denies that, saying it only offers political support to the people of Kashmir,



Fresh curb imposed in Jammu & Kashmir ahead of Friday prayers
Kashmiris allege torture in army crackdown

China rejected HK plan

Sources say Beijing ordered Lam not to yield to any of the protesters' demands

Earlier this summer, Carrie Lam, the chief executive of Hong Kong, submitted a report to Beijing that assessed protesters' five key demands and found that withdrawing a contentious extradition bill could help defuse the mounting political crisis in the territory. The Chinese central government rejected Lam's proposal to withdraw the extradition bill and ordered her not to yield to any of the protesters' other demands at that time, three individuals with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters. China's role in directing how Hong Kong handles the protests has been widely assumed, supported by stern statements in state media about the country's sovereignty and protesters' "radical" goals. Beijing's rebuff of Lam's proposal for how to resolve the crisis, detailed for the first time by Reuters, represents concrete evidence of the extent to which China is controlling the Hong Kong government's response to the unrest. The Chinese central government has condemned the protests and accused foreign powers of fuelling unrest. The Foreign Ministry has repeatedly warned other nations against interfering in Hong Kong, reiterating that the situation there is an "internal affair." Lam's report on the tumult was made before an August 7 meeting in Shenzhen about the Hong Kong crisis, led by senior Chinese officials. The report examined the feasibility of the protesters' five demands, and analysed how conceding to some of them might quieten things down, the individuals with direct knowledge said. Beijing told Lam not to withdraw the extradition bill, or to launch an inquiry into the tumult, including allegations of excessive police force, according to the senior government official.



Bolivian President Evo Morales helps firefighters to control a fire near Charagua, Bolivia, in the border with Paraguay, south of the Amazon basin, on Thursday. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's son and hopeful ambassador to the United States travelled to Washington yesterday to thank Donald Trump for his support during the crisis surrounding the fires in the Amazon rainforest.

SYRIA CONFLICT

Regime, Russia step up assault on rebel-held Idlib

Syria and its ally Russia have stepped up an offensive against the last big stronghold of Syrian rebels, mounting more air raids and deploying ground reinforcements including Iranian-backed militias, army defectors and residents said yesterday. The Russian-led alliance is pushing into densely populated parts of Idlib province in the northwest where millions of people who fled fighting elsewhere in Syria have taken refuge. The northwest offensive has prompted UN warnings of a new humanitarian crisis amid the gains by Damascus and its partner Moscow, which has helped President Bashar al-Assad turn the tide in the eight-year-old conflict since intervening in 2015. Moving deeper into territory along the Turkish border, the advance took the town of Tamaneh after earlier capturing Khwain, Zarzor and Tamaneh farms, the defectors and residents said. They were the first gains since the alliance, battling a coalition of jihadists and mainstream Turkey-backed rebels, seized a main rebel pocket in nearby Hama province last week. The offensive has been reinforced by elite army units and Iranian-backed militias, the defectors and residents said. "There are daily reinforcements coming from the Iranian militias, elite Republican Guards units and Fourth Armoured Division," Colonel Mustafa Bakour, a commander in Jaish al Izza rebel group, told Reuters. Russia's defence ministry said Syrian government forces will unilaterally cease fire in the "de-escalation zone" in Idlib region this morning, TASS news agency said.

British PM warns MPs

Says any attempt to block Brexit would do 'lasting damage' to public trust in politics

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday warned any attempt by MPs next week to stop Brexit or delay it beyond October 31 would do "lasting damage" to public trust in politics. Johnson said Britons had decided to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum and MPs had promised multiple times to uphold that decision. "If we stop the UK from leaving on October 31, if that's what parliamentarians end up doing, it will do lasting damage to people's trust in politics," he told Sky News television. "It will do lasting and catastrophic damage to the major parties in this country. This political generation won't be forgiven for failing to honour that promise." Opposition MPs and some lawmakers from Johnson's own Conservatives have said they want to legislate to prevent a no-deal Brexit, which the government's own assessment warns could cause food, fuel and medicine shortages. But Johnson said that preparing for a no-deal Brexit would allow the government to clinch an agreement with Brussels. "I'm afraid that the more our friends and partners think, at the back of their minds, that Brexit could be stopped, that the UK could be kept in by parliament, the less likely they are to give us the deal that we need," he said. Johnson on Wednesday moved to suspend parliament in the final weeks before Brexit in what was widely seen as a move to limit the parliamentary time for his opponents. Queen Elizabeth II, on his advice, gave the go-ahead to shutter parliament between mid-September and October 14. The move sent shockwaves through British politics, triggering a furious outcry from pro-Europeans and MPs opposed to a no-deal exit. The decision is being challenged in several legal cases. Judge Raymond Doherty yesterday rejected a request for a temporary block on the suspension decision but will hear the full case at a further hearing in Edinburgh on Tuesday. Former prime minister John Major, a strong supporter of EU membership, said he will seek to join a separate case in London, which is due to be heard in court on Thursday.

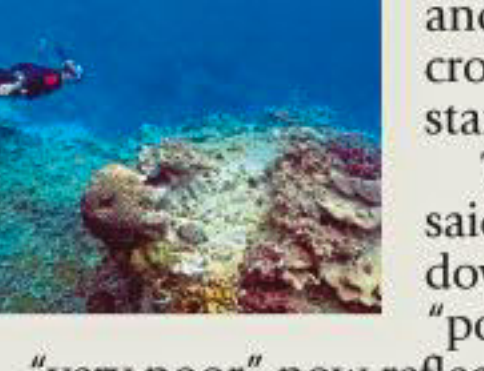


Judge rejects first bid to block UK parliament suspension
EX-UK PM John Major joins court case to stop parliament suspension

Great Barrier Reef in 'very poor' condition: report

Australia downgraded the Great Barrier Reef's long-term outlook to "very poor" for the first time yesterday, as the world heritage site struggles with "escalating" climate change. In its latest five-yearly report on the health of the world's largest coral reef system, the government's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority singled out rising sea temperatures as the biggest threat to the giant organism. "The significant and large-scale impacts from record-breaking sea surface temperatures have resulted in coral reef habitat transitioning from poor to very poor condition," the government agency said. "Climate change is escalating and is the most significant threat to the Region's long-term outlook. "Significant global action to address climate change is critical to slowing deterioration of the Reef's ecosystem and heritage values and supporting recovery," it said. But the agency added that the threats to the 2,300-kilometre (1,400-mile) reef were "multiple, cumulative and increasing" and, in addition to warming seas, included agricultural run-off and coral-eating crown of thorns starfish. The agency said the outlook downgrade from "poor" in 2014 to "very poor" now reflected the greater expansion of coral deterioration across the massive reef, notably following back-to-back coral bleaching events caused by sea temperature spikes in 2016 and 2017. "The window of opportunity to improve the reef's long-term future is now," it said.

CLIMATE CRISIS



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