

NEWSIN brief

California boat fire death toll rises to 25

REUTERS, Santa Barbara
Divers have found a total of 25 bodies on Monday after a pre-dawn fire sank a scuba diving vessel off a Southern California island, leaving nine people unaccounted for as the search continued, media reported. Representatives for the Coast Guard's division in Los Angeles and the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office could not immediately be reached to confirm the report from the Associated Press, which cited the US Coast Guard. The Santa Barbara sheriff had earlier confirmed eight people had died after a fire broke out aboard the Conception at about 3:15 am on Monday.

Four dead in fire at Mumbai gas plant

TNN, Navi Mumbai
At least four people, including three CISF personnel, were killed after a massive fire broke out in the stormwater drainage at ONGC's gas processing facility in Navi Mumbai's Uran area early yesterday. Officials said three Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel also suffered burns in the incident and were admitted to Uran rural hospital. The state-run petroleum company said that mishap had no impact on the oil processing at the unit, adding that the gas was diverted to its Hazira plant in Gujarat's Surat district.

Gunmen kill 5 people at Mexico bus station

AFP, Cuernavaca
Gunmen attacked a bus station in Mexico Monday, killing five people and wounding one in Cuernavaca, a picturesque colonial city popular with tourists, authorities said. The security commission for the state of Morelos, of which Cuernavaca is the capital, said the gunmen staged a "targeted" attack, seeking out specific victims at the Estrella de Oro bus station, near the city centre.



Afghan security forces walk as municipal workers gather to clean up near the crater from where a tractor packed with explosives exploded the night before at the Green Village in Kabul yesterday. The massive blast claimed by Taliban killed at least 16 people, officials said. Inset, Afghan men transfer the dead body of a civilian onto the bed of a police pickup at the site of a blast in Kabul. The attack came as the insurgents and Washington try to finalise a withdrawal deal.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

PRO-DEMOCRACY PROTESTS

HK leader insists she will stay on

AFP, Hong Kong
Hong Kong's embattled leader insisted yesterday she had no intention of stepping down after an audio recording emerged of her saying she wanted to quit over three months of unrest in the southern Chinese city.
Hong Kong has endured dozens of sometimes violent pro-democracy protests triggered by opposition to Chief Executive Carrie Lam's bid to push through a law allowing extraditions to mainland China.
The protests have evolved into a wider democracy campaign involving clashes between protesters and police, in the biggest challenge to China's rule of Hong Kong since its 1997 handover from the British.
"I told myself repeatedly in the last three months that and my team should stay on to help Hong Kong," Lam told a press conference yesterday morning.
Lam said she had "not even contemplated" discussing her resignation with the Chinese government, which gives Hong Kong a restricted form of autonomy.
"The conflict that I myself want to quit but cannot quit does not exist," she said.
Lam was speaking after Reuters news agency released an audio recording of her telling business leaders last week that she wanted to step down and take responsibility for the unrest.
"For a chief executive to have caused this huge havoc to Hong Kong is unforgivable," an emotional Lam said in the audio recording.
"If I have a choice," she said, speaking in English, "the first thing is to quit, having made a deep apology."
Lam told the business leaders she had "very limited" room to resolve the crisis because it had become a national security and sovereignty issue for China.
Beijing yesterday repeated its support for the chief executive, but warned it would "never allow the situation in Hong Kong to continue unabated."

Pak won't start military conflict with India: PM

Strongly condemns 27-day-long curfew in J&K

DAWN ONLINE
Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday both Pakistan and India are nuclear-armed states and escalation of tension may threaten world peace, adding that Pakistan will never start a military conflict.
He said the two countries were sitting on a ticking bomb that warranted a joint strategy to resolve grave issues of poverty, joblessness and imminent threat of climate change rather than talking of war.
"We both are nuclear-armed countries. If these tensions increase, the world could be in danger," Khan said, addressing members of the Sikh religious community in the eastern city of Lahore. "There will be no first from our side ever," he said.
"Soon after assuming the office of prime minister, I decided to improve Pak-India bilateral relations and asserted if India takes one step forward, we will reach out with two steps. I spoke to Indian premier Narendra Modi and advised him that the 72-year long-standing issue of



Kashmir could be resolved through dialogue," he said and regretted that the response was condescending.
The prime minister said the turn of events during the past one year saw India asking for various conditions as if it was a super power and talking to a poor country, adding that war could not be a solution to any problem and those looking for this option were fools.
Warning that war led to more crises and problems than resolving issues at hand, Khan said those who tried the war option regretted for many years to come.
Khan also strongly condemned the 27-day-long curfew in occupied Kashmir to confine eight million Kashmiris in their homes without any food and medicines.
He urged the Sikh community to raise their voice against oppression and torture being committed against Muslims in India and held Kashmir. Welcoming the Sikhs to visit their holy places in Kartarpur and Nankana Sahib, the prime minister said the Pakistan government would fully facilitate the Sikh community and offer multiple visas in due course of time.

UN REPORT ON YEMEN CONFLICT

US, France, UK may be complicit in war crimes

REUTERS, Geneva
The United States, Britain and France may be complicit in war crimes in Yemen by arming and providing intelligence and logistics support to a Saudi-led coalition that starves civilians as a war tactic, the United Nations said yesterday.
UN investigators recommended that all states impose a ban on arms transfers to the warring parties to prevent them from being used to commit serious violations.
"It is clear that the continued supply of weapons to parties to the conflict is perpetuating the conflict and prolonging the suffering of the Yemeni people," Melissa Parke, an expert on the independent UN panel, told a news conference.
"That is why we are urging member states to no longer supply weapons to parties to the conflict," she said.
Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the main parties in the coalition fighting against the Iran-aligned Houthi

movement that controls Yemen's capital, are two of the biggest buyers of US, British and French weapons.
The experts compiled a secret list of suspected war criminals. Investigators found potential crimes on both sides, while highlighting the role Western countries play as backers of the Arab states and Iran in support of the Houthis.
"There are no clean hands in this combat, in this contest," panelist Charles Garraway said.
The report accused the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE of killing civilians in air strikes and deliberately denying them food in a country facing famine. The Houthis, for their part, have shelled cities, deployed child soldiers and used "siege-like warfare", it said.
Neither the Saudi government communications office nor UAE officials responded immediately to Reuters requests for comment.

Assam govt to provide legal aid to the needy: MHA

ANI, New Delhi
The Assam government will provide legal aid to the needy people from amongst those who have been excluded from the final list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), according to the ministry of home affairs (MHA).

EXCLUSION FROM NRC



"State government has also made necessary arrangements to provide legal aid to the needy people amongst those excluded from NRC final list, by providing all assistance through the District Legal Services Authorities (DLSA)," a tweet by the official handle of the spokesperson of MHA yesterday read.
It added that no person whose name has been excluded from the NRC list will be detained by the authorities and can challenge his exclusion from the list using the remedial measures provided.
"Persons left out of NRC final list NOT to be detained under any circumstance till they exhaust all remedies available under law. Such persons to continue to enjoy all rights as earlier, like any other citizen, example right to employment, education, property etc.," another tweet read.
The spokesperson, in another tweet, added that 200 new Foreigners' Tribunal in addition to the ones which are already functional will be opened to hear the appeal of the people in Assam.
"Adequate judicial process available for affected persons to appeal to Foreigners' Tribunal within 120 days from August 8. To facilitate appeal, 200 new FTs to be functional from today, in addition to 100 already existing," the tweet on Monday read.
The spokesperson tweeted a day after over 19 lakh people were excluded from the final NRC list that was published on August 30.
NRC State Coordinator Prateek Hajela had said that a total of 3,11,21,004 persons are found eligible for inclusion in final NRC, leaving out 19,06,657 persons.



A car drives through a flooded street after the effects of Hurricane Dorian arrived in Nassau, Bahamas, on Monday. Dorian hovered over the Bahamas as surging seawaters and ferocious winds sowed chaos in low-lying island communities, killing at least five people and spurring mass evacuations on the US east coast.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Indian journo probed over school meal expose

Authorities' attempt to charge an Indian journalist who exposed the poor quality of meals served at a government school triggered protests yesterday over fears of worsening press freedom in the country. Pawan Jaiswal made national headlines after reporting that impoverished primary school students in a district in Uttar Pradesh state were fed bread with salt instead of a mandated healthy meal. The report led to widespread criticism of the local government controlled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which responded by launching a criminal probe against Jaiswal. "It is a cruel and classic case of shooting the messenger," the Editors Guild of India said in a statement on Monday.

South Africa wakes up to anti-foreigner violence

South African police patrolled central Johannesburg yesterday after the financial capital was hit by a new wave of anti-foreigner violence. Rocks, bricks and rubber bullets strewed the empty streets of Alexandra after mobs plundered the township overnight, burning and looting the shops in their path. AFP photographers in Alexandra said police presence remained heavy and that rubber bullets were still being fired to disperse the crowds. The police were scheduled to meet with community leaders later yesterday.

Iran's Rouhani rules out direct US talks



President Hassan Rouhani yesterday ruled out holding any bilateral talks with the United States and threatened to further cut Iran's commitments to a nuclear deal within days. In an address to parliament, Rouhani said any dialogue with the US would have to fall within the framework of the group of major powers that agreed the landmark nuclear deal with Iran in 2015. Rouhani also said Iran was ready to further reduce its commitments to the accord "in the coming days" if current negotiations with European nations yield no results by Thursday. Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since May last year.

SOURCE: AFP

Italian parties agree agenda to form govt

REUTERS, Rome
Italy's anti-establishment 5-Star Movement and centre-left Democratic Party (PD) unveiled a shared political programme yesterday for their mooted coalition, putting an expansionary 2020 budget at the top of their agenda.
5-Star, created a decade ago out of opposition to the PD, has agreed to form a new administration with its former foes to head off a snap election after its previous coalition with the far-right League collapsed last month.
Supporters of 5-Star are holding an online ballot on whether to support the proposed coalition and results were due by 1730 GMT. Shortly after the voting started, the parties published a 26-point programme that would underpin the planned government.
"This is a very delicate moment for the country. It must be tackled by focusing on the interests and needs of citizens, of the community that we all form together," 5-Star said in a blog yesterday, calling on its supporters to back the deal.
Italian benchmark 10-year bond yields hit record lows yesterday in a sign that investors believed the new administration would take office, heading off the risk of an early election and prolonged political instability.

Quick win for Zelenskiy

Ukraine parliament strips lawmakers' immunity

REUTERS, Kiev
Ukrainian lawmakers voted to strip themselves of immunity from prosecution yesterday, fulfilling an anti-corruption election promise by reformist President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.
A former comedian with no prior political experience, Zelenskiy won the presidency by a landslide in April, tapping into voter anger over graft and low living standards.
Previously, lawmakers could only be stripped of immunity by a parliamentary vote on each individual case. But the new measure passed easily by 373 votes in the 450-seat parliament where Zelenskiy won a majority in a July snap election.
"We promised to remove immunity, we promised that there would be no people with a special status in Ukraine," said Alexander Dubinsky, a lawmaker in Zelenskiy's Servant of the People party.
"It is our duty to vote for this law and put people who are outside this hall on equal terms with those people in this hall."
Before the vote, the president had said it was time to consign lawmakers' immunity "to the dustbin of history", arguing that 90% of Ukrainians wanted to see this happen.
Opponents, however, said removing lawmakers' protection leaves them vulnerable to politically-motivated prosecutions.
Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, leader of the Voice party, said it would vote for the measure because all people should be equal before the law, but said those in power should not succumb to the temptation to abuse the change.
The law, which signals Zelenskiy's commitment to push through reforms, will take effect from the start of next year.



Man kills 8 school children in China

AFP, Beijing
Eight schoolchildren have died and two others were injured in a "school-related criminal case" in central China, with a 40-year-old suspect arrested, local authorities said yesterday, the latest attack targeting an educational institution in the country.
The man was detained by police on the spot following Monday's incident in Chaoyangpo Village in Hubei province, according to a statement on the website of the government of Enshi city.
The local government is making "every effort" to organise the rehabilitation and treatment for the wounded, including psychological counselling, the statement said.
Officials did not say how the students were killed, but schools have been hit by a number of knife attacks in China in recent years, forcing authorities to step up security.