

NEWS IN  
briefGreek police evict  
over 200 migrants

AFP, Athens

Police in Athens yesterday removed over 200 migrants, including dozens of children, from two squats in the city centre as part of a clean up drive by the new conservative government. Some 230 people, including 70 children, were removed and taken to the police headquarters for identification, Athens municipal radio reported. The police declined to give details. State TV ERT showed the migrants boarding buses, some of them clutching plastic bags with their belongings.

Venezuela calls on US  
to restore ties

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's socialist government on Wednesday called on the United States to restore diplomatic ties with Caracas after it opened talks with fringe opposition parties. Venezuela broke off relations with the United States after Washington recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president on January 23. Vice President Delcy Rodriguez told reporters in Caracas that it made sense for the US "to restore diplomatic contacts and dialogue with the government" of President Nicolas Maduro.

Belgian pilot saved  
from power line

AFP, Rennes

An F-16 jet of the Belgian air force yesterday crashed in western France, with both pilots successfully ejecting but one spending two hours hanging from a power line before being cut down, officials said. Parts from the stricken plane, which was not carrying weapons and was flying from Belgium to a French base on a training mission, crashed into houses in the Morbihan region around the town of Pluvigner.



Afghan security forces investigate the site where a Taliban car bomb detonated near an intelligence services building in Qalat in Zabul province yesterday. The attack left at least 20 people dead and 95 wounded, the governor of Zabul province said.

PHOTO: AFP

Taliban truck bomb  
kills 20 in Afghanistan

Flattens hospital, govt building; 95 hurt

REUTERS, Kabul

A Taliban truck bomb killed at least 20 people and wounded 95 when it exploded near a hospital in southern Afghanistan yesterday, a provincial official said, with casualties expected to rise as rescuers sift the rubble.

The Taliban, who have been carrying out nearly daily attacks since the collapse of peace talks with the United States this month, said the target was a nearby building of the government's intelligence department in Qalat, the capital of Zabul province.

"The bomb was huge and it was carried by a mini-truck," said a senior defence ministry official in the capital, Kabul, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to media.

The militants wanted to target a training base for Afghanistan's powerful National Directorate of Security, but parked the vehicle laden with explosives outside a hospital gate nearby, said another defence ministry source.

Twenty bodies and 95 wounded people had been evacuated from the blast site, said Haji Atta Jan Haqbayan, a member of the provincial council in Qalat.

"The number of casualties may rise as

rescue teams and people are still searching for bodies under the rubble," he added.

Several women, children, health workers and patients in the hospital were critically injured in the blast.

There has been no let-up in Taliban attacks across Afghanistan as it prepares for a presidential election this month.

The Taliban has warned that its fighters will step up their campaign against the Afghan government and foreign forces to dissuade people from voting in the Sept. 28 election.

More than 9 million Afghans are expected to vote in the presidential election, during which the government has committed more than 70,000 security forces across Afghanistan to protection duties.

US President Donald Trump abruptly ended talks this month with the Taliban for a deal on the withdrawal of thousands of American troops from Afghanistan, in exchange for security guarantees from the hardline Islamist group.

The talks, which did not include the Afghan government, were intended to lead to wider peace negotiations to end the 18-year-long war in Afghanistan.

## Genuine voters left out

Mamata tells Amit Shah on Assam NRC, clarifies her stand that exercise not required in West Bengal

NDTV ONLINE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee flagged the issue of citizens' register during her meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah yesterday.

Pointing out that 19 lakh people, many of whom were "genuine voters" have been left out of the citizenship registry in Assam, she told him that the exercise is not required in Bengal.

The implementation of the citizens' list in Assam - which left out 19 lakh people - has been widely criticised owing to the omissions. Even a section of BJP leaders in Assam have criticised it, claiming the list left out a number of Bengali Hindus who were among the party's core voter group.

"I handed over a letter to him (Amit Shah), told him that of the 19 lakh people left out of NRC, many are Hindi speaking, Bengali speaking and local Assamese. Many genuine voters have been left out. This should be looked into. I submitted an official letter," Mamata Banerjee said. "As Chief Minister of a state with boundaries with foreign countries --Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal -- it is part of my duty," she added.

The Bengal Chief Minister had met Prime Minister

## HK ACTIVISTS' PLEA TO CONGRESS

Stop adding fuel to  
the fire: China to US

AFP, Beijing

Beijing yesterday accused Washington of "adding fuel to the fire" of Hong Kong unrest after leaders of the city's pro-democracy movement appealed directly to US lawmakers to exert pressure on China.

Activists from the semi-autonomous city testified before a congressional commission in support of US legislation aimed at defending civil rights in Hong Kong, which has been convulsed by weeks of huge, sometimes violent rallies.

Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a press briefing yesterday that the US should "stop supporting violent radical forces and Hong Kong independence separatists, and stop adding fuel to the fire to the words and deeds that damage the prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region."

Geng called for the US to "stop interfering in Hong Kong's affairs in any form."

Millions have taken to the streets of Hong Kong in months of protests, which were initially against a now-dropped bid by its leaders to allow extraditions to the mainland, but broadened into a wider push for democracy.

The hearing on Tuesday examined legislation that would end Hong Kong's special trading status with the US unless the State Department each year certifies that the city's authorities are respecting human rights and rule of law.

Beijing has repeatedly accused "foreign forces" of being behind the pro-democracy protests.

A related bill under consideration would ban the sale of tear gas, rubber bullets and other crowd control equipment to the Hong Kong police after concerns that Western imports abetted their crackdown.

Pak PM: No talks till India  
restores J&K special status

Modi vows to create new paradise in the valley

DAWN ONLINE, TOI

Pledging to present the "Kashmir case" at the United Nations General Assembly "like no one ever did before", Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said there was no use talking to India unless it lifted curfew and restored the special status of held Kashmir.

"To India's misfortune, it has been taken over by extremist and racist Hindus. Only a person with an extremist mind-set would do what they have done in Kashmir by keeping it under curfew for 45 days," he said at a presser after inaugurating the Integrated Transit Trade Management System at the Pak-Afghan border.

Torkham, located 55km northwest of here, serves as one of the major border crossings with Afghanistan. The new management system has allowed for round-the-clock trade and immigration facilities at the border crossing.

On Wednesday, Pakistan refused a

request from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cross its airspace on a flight to Germany, Pakistan's foreign minister said.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Islamabad had told the Indian High Commission it was turning down India's request for Modi to fly across the country today and for his return the following week.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday called for "hugging" each Kashmiri and creating a "new paradise" in the valley. Launching the BJP's poll campaign for the next month's Maharashtra assembly elections, Modi said a lot of efforts are being

made from across the border to foment violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We have to create a new paradise (in Kashmir)... hug each Kashmiri," he said.

The decision to revoke provisions under Article 370 was a decision for the unity of India, Modi said.



Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh waves to the media from the co-pilot seat before flying on a sortie in a 'Tejas' Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) at HAL Airport in Bangalore yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Lanka to hold  
presidential  
vote on Nov 16

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka will hold a presidential election on November 16, the head of the island nation's election body told Reuters on Wednesday, as its \$87 billion economy struggles to recover from a political crisis and the aftermath of deadly Islamist bombings.

The official notification was published later on Wednesday, Sri Lanka's Election Commission Chairman Mahinda Deshapriya said. Nominations for the contest will close by October 7.

Election Commission officials have said there could be a record 18 candidates in this year's election, while analysts say it is possible that a run-off count will be needed to decide the winner of a tight contest in which no-one is likely to poll more than 50% of first-preference votes.

The main opposition Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, has already nominated his younger brother and wartime defence chief Gotabaya.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's centre-right United National Party (UNP) is yet to nominate its candidate, but party sources told Reuters it was likely to be decided between deputy leader Sajith Premadasa and Parliament Speaker Karu Jayasuriya.

Gotabaya, 70, is widely seen as the frontrunner due to his popularity among Sri Lanka's Sinhala Buddhist majority, many of whom credit him with ending the 26-year civil war in 2009 and believe that Colombo needs a seasoned leader after Easter bombings.

However, Gotabaya faces a legal battle over allegations of misappropriation of state funds when he was defence chief, along with questions over the renunciation of his US citizenship.

Migrant workers in  
Qatar still exploited

Says Amnesty Int'l report

REUTERS, Doha

Hundreds of migrant workers in Qatar have gone without pay and many were forced to return to their home countries without compensation, despite recent reforms intended to improve worker rights, a report from Amnesty International said yesterday.

Since being named host of World Cup 2022, Qatar has come under fire for what rights groups describe as poor labour conditions. It has responded by enacting a broad reform programme to guard worker rights and improve its image abroad.

The Gulf state relies on about 2 million migrant workers for the bulk of its labour force, mainly from Asian countries like Nepal, India and the Philippines.

It has scrapped exit visas for most workers, implemented a minimum wage, and established dispute resolution committees to fast-track complaints of unpaid wages.

But a new report from Amnesty International describes how hundreds of workers still can't recover unpaid salaries, despite the resolution committees.

"Despite the significant promises of reform which Qatar has made ahead of the 2022 World Cup, it remains a playground for unscrupulous employers," said Amnesty International's Deputy Director of Global Issues, Stephen Cockburn.

Indonesia forest fires choke  
Southeast Asian neighbours

Malaysia raises diplomatic temperature

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia said yesterday it will raise pressure on its Southeast Asian neighbours to find a solution to recurring outbreaks of smog-belching forest fires in Indonesia, as air quality plummeted and more schools closed.

Blazes to clear agricultural land in the archipelago are sending toxic haze across Southeast Asia, with Jakarta's efforts to fight them using water-bombing aircraft and thousands of security forces proving futile.

The Indonesian fires are an annual problem during the dry season, but this year's are the worst since 2015 and have added to concerns about wildfire outbreaks worldwide exacerbating global warming.

Nearly 2,500 schools were closed across Malaysia yesterday -- including almost 300 in the capital Kuala Lumpur -- as were hundreds on Indonesia's Sumatra island and the Indonesian part of Borneo, where

the vast majority of fires are burning.

Satellite images released by Nasa Earth Observatory show Borneo covered in a pall of smoke.

The island is divided between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. Acrid smog has the skies of Singapore in recent days, raising fears it may affect this Sunday's Formula One race.

Officials from regional bloc the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have long struggled to come up with fixes for the smog outbreaks, signing an agreement and

holding regular meetings, but with little effect.

Malaysian Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin signalled she would again pursue the diplomatic route in an effort to find a solution to a crisis that has been recurring every few years for more than two decades.

Asean officials struggling to  
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## SUCCESSION ROW OVER DALAI LAMA

US lays down red  
line against China

AFP, Washington

As Tibetans start grappling with the once unthinkable prospect of the octogenarian Dalai Lama's passing, the United States is looking to lay down a red line against China handpicking his successor.

Through a warning from a senior official and legislation under consideration in Congress, the United States is hoping to make clear in advance that Beijing would face international opprobrium if it tries to take over the reincarnation process.

At 84, the 14th Dalai Lama has slowed his once incessant travel down a notch and earlier this year was hospitalized for a chest infection, although there is no indication he faces serious health issues.

Nonetheless, both Tibetan activists and Beijing are keenly aware that his death will mark a major setback in his push for more autonomy for the Himalayan region, depriving the cause of a Nobel Prize winner whose moral teachings and idiosyncratic humour have made him one of the world's most popular religious leaders.

A bill recently introduced in the US Congress would call for sanctions on any Chinese official who interferes with Tibetan Buddhist succession practices.