



YOUTHS' CLIMATE STRIKE
Crowds of children skipped school yesterday to join a global strike against climate change, heeding the rallying cry of teen activist Greta Thunberg and demanding adults act to stop environmental disaster. Yelling slogans and waving placards, children and adults across Asia and the Pacific kicked off the protest, which spread later to Africa and Europe with crowds filling the streets in Paris, London and Berlin. From top left, clockwise, these photos show protests in London, Nairobi, New Delhi, New York and Solomon Islands.



India police arrest former minister after rape claim
Indian police yesterday arrested a former minister from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party after he was accused of sexually assaulting a 23-year-old woman. Swami Chinmayanand, 73, a former internal affairs minister, is the second senior member of the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party to face sex charges in recent months. Chinmayanand runs several educational and welfare institutions in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and the victim was a student at one of his colleges, according to media reports. The woman on Thursday threatened to set herself on fire if police did not take action against Chinmayanand. She filed a case in early September and authorities had faced criticism over the pace of the investigation.

Bloomberg reporters in Turkey court over article
Two Bloomberg reporters went on trial in a Turkish court yesterday, facing up to five years in prison over claims they tried to sabotage the economy with an article about last year's currency crisis. They were among dozens of defendants, including some who had simply written jokes about the currency crisis on Twitter. The Bloomberg article was published in August 2018 on a dramatic day when the lira lost around a fifth of its value against the dollar. Others in court appeared shocked to be on trial over throwaway comments on Twitter. "If me and the others in this room can ruin the economy with tweets, then we are all toast," said one of the defendants, Halit Tokkus.

Russia, China veto UN resolution on Syria
Russia and China on Thursday vetoed a UN Security Council resolution backed by 12 of the 15 member states that called for a ceasefire in Syria's war-torn Idlib province. It was Russia's 13th veto of a UN resolution since the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, highlighting the Security Council's impasse over the issue. The failed resolution said that all parties should cease hostilities "to avoid a further deterioration of the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Idlib Governorate, beginning at noon Damascus time on 21 September." But following two weeks of negotiations, Russia quashed the text after pressing unsuccessfully to include an exception for "anti-terrorist operations."

Zuckerberg nixes idea of breaking up Facebook
Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg met Thursday with US President Donald Trump and members of Congress on a political reconnaissance mission to Washington, where he rejected calls to break up the world's biggest social network. Zuckerberg's visit comes as Facebook faces a myriad of regulatory and legal questions surrounding issues like competition, digital privacy, censorship and transparency in political advertising. A Facebook spokesman said discussions were focusing in part on future internet regulation. Federal and state anti-trust enforcers are looking into potential anti-competitive actions by Facebook, and members of Congress are debating national privacy legislation.

NEWS IN brief

NY mayor de Blasio ends presidential bid

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio yesterday announced that he was ending his floundering bid to be nominated as the Democratic candidate in next year's US presidential election. "It's clearly not my time, I am going to end my presidential campaign," de Blasio told MSNBC.

US expels 2 Cuba's UN mission staff

Two members of Cuba's UN mission have been ordered to leave the United States over an alleged threat to US national security, triggering a sharp denial from Havana. US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus said that the pair had been "abusing their privileges of residence" and attempting to "conduct influence operations against the United States."

Vaping-related illness sickens 530 in US

More than 500 people have been sickened in an outbreak of vaping-related illness in the US health authorities said Thursday, as Los Angeles became the latest city to take steps to ban flavored e-cigarettes. At least seven deaths have been attributed to vaping so far. E-cigarettes have been touted as a safer alternative to smoking. But critics say the risks are insufficiently understood, while flavored vaping liquids appeal particularly to children and risk getting them addicted to nicotine.

AFP, Hirpora

The soldiers came after midnight, Abid Khan says, his hands trembling, one of around two dozen young men in just one part of Kashmir who say they have been tortured by the Indian army. The alleged abuse, residents say, is aimed at creating a climate of fear after India stripped the long-restive, blood-soaked Himalayan region of its autonomy on August 5. Khan, 26, from Hirpora village in Shopian district, says he was dragged out and blindfolded along with his brother, who has learning difficulties, on August 14. "They gave electric shocks to my brother right on the road outside. I heard him scream painfully," Khan told AFP, showing marks on his arms, legs and buttocks. Once inside the nearby Chowgam army camp, Khan said soldiers stripped him naked, tied up his legs and wrists, suspended him and beat him with rods. The camp major, Khan said, accused

him of inviting Riyaz Naikoo from Hizbul Mujahideen -- one of several militant groups fighting Indian rule -- to his recent marriage. An uprising in Indian Kashmir -- backed New Delhi says by Pakistan which since 1947 has controlled the other part of the region -- has killed tens of thousands since 1989, mostly civilians. "I kept repeating that was not true," Khan said. "Then they gave me electric shocks again on my genitals and wounds. One of them said 'I will make you impotent.'" After being released at dawn and barely able to stand, Khan says he kept vomiting for 10 days and only managed to start moving around again after 20 days. "I can't eat properly anymore," he said. "I don't go into the room my wife sleeps in anymore... It's better to die with a bullet than undergo such torture." New Delhi says its Kashmir lockdown since last month, with mobile service and the internet still snapped in most areas, is to prevent "terrorists" backed

by Islamabad from stirring up trouble. India's national security advisor has denied that the military has committed any atrocities, a statement echoed by Colonel Rajesh Kalia, an army spokesman in Kashmir. But people in Hirpora say they often hear screams from the army camp at night. "The army is making examples of two or three young men from each village," said one resident of Shopian. The pattern is often of soldiers raiding homes, taking identity cards and mobiles and telling young men to report to the camps to retrieve them. Sajjad Hyder Khan, a local official in Pinjoora village told AFP he has seen a list of 1,800 people detained by police and soldiers from Shopian alone, one of the four districts in the southern Kashmir Valley. Not far from his home in Shopian town, five soldiers in black with "COMMANDO" on their sleeves and carrying assault rifles were going house to house, seeking details of residents.

"In my humble subdued voice, all I can say is that the pressure is there in order to prevent people from protesting," said Khan, the Pinjoora official. And it has worked. The official added: "There has been no stone pelting on the soldiers since August 5." **UN CHIEF LIKELY TO DISCUSS KASHMIR AT UN** UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is likely to use the opportunity of discussions during the high-level UN General Assembly session next week to raise the Kashmir issue, the UN chief's spokesperson has said. Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric during the daily press briefing on Thursday said that the UN chief has underscored the need for dialogue as the only way to resolve the issue and, "as part of the solution for the current crisis in Kashmir, to make sure that human rights aspects are very much dealt with, as well." "I think he will also use the opportunity of discussions during the General Assembly to raise it," Dujarric said, responding to a question on Kashmir.

Screams in the night in J&K

HK protests divide families

AFP, Hong Kong

For weeks, Jane lied to her mother about joining Hong Kong's protests -- pretending her rucksack was bulging with books, not supplies -- until the ideological rift between them grew so great she had to move out. With millions marching to protest stuttering freedoms under Beijing's rule over the last 100 days, Jane found herself increasingly arguing with her mother who was bitterly opposed to the pro-democracy movement. Eventually, she had to leave her mother's flat. It was a huge emotional blow. Jane was raised solely by her mother. Jane said she tried to explain the movement's goals of a more democratic Hong Kong but her arguments fell on deaf ears with her mother. "She believes what China says, she believes the protesters are paid by foreigners, that all protesters are thugs," Jane lamented. "She never believes me."



The three months of huge, sometimes violent protests in the semi-autonomous Chinese city are overwhelmingly youth-led. Younger protesters say they often find themselves at ideological odds with parents or older relatives. "At the beginning, we would eat in silence. It was so depressing that now I don't go home until I know my parents are in bed," said Chris who graduated recently and started a job at a top bank.

"I think it comes down to education. My parents were educated in China and weren't taught about democracy and freedom," he said, explaining how his parents came to Hong Kong in the 1990s as stowaways looking for a better quality of life. "What my parents want is stability and economic well-being. But I want more than that and I will fight for it," said Chris, describing how his normally-settled home life has spun into an "us versus them" conflict.

Israel vote deadlock confirmed

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli vote results yesterday confirmed a deadlock in the country's general election and put Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party as the second-largest, leaving him with a tough battle to extend his long tenure in office. The near-complete official results from Tuesday's election gave ex-military chief Benny Gantz's centrist Blue and White alliance the most seats, with 33 out of parliament's 120. Netanyahu's right-wing Likud won 31 seats. The standoff has even raised the possibility of yet another election -- which would be the third to be held in a year.

CLIMATE PLAN

Germany reaches 100b euro deal

AFP, Berlin

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government reached a deal yesterday on a broad climate plan for Germany that commits at least 100 billion euros by 2030 to environmental protection, as tens of thousands of protesters rallied demanding action. After marathon overnight talks dragging more than 18 hours, the coalition sealed a deal which covers a slew of measures from tackling emissions in the energy and industrial sectors, to incentives for zero-emission electric vehicles or public transport. Under the plan, flight prices will go up while train tickets will get cheaper. Some 86 billion euros (\$94 billion) will be ploughed into railway infrastructure, and funding will be provided to test innovative ways to incite more people to use public transport such as 365-euro annual tickets. The government said the investment would not affect its plans to keep the budget balanced, but that it would help to "support the economy". The EU's biggest economy is set to miss climate targets for next year but has committed itself to meeting the 2030 goal of a 55-percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels.

Congress, intel leaders clash over whistleblower report on Trump

AFP, Washington

The US intelligence watchdog briefed lawmakers Thursday about the handling of a whistleblower complaint on alleged behavior by President Donald Trump, and a senior Democrat expressed alarm that the administration refuses to share the complaint with Congress. The allegations, rejected by Trump as "presidential harassment," have set lawmakers on a collision course with the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), which is refusing to share the details -- raising suspicions the top spy official might be improperly protecting the president. According to a report by The Washington Post, which cited two unnamed former US officials, a complaint filed by a US intelligence official stemmed from Trump's communications with a foreign leader and a "promise" allegedly made by the president. The foreign leader involved was not identified by the Post.



The newspaper did say the complaint "centers" on Ukraine. Trump spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky -- who was elected in May -- about two weeks before the complaint was filed, reports said. The whistleblower had filed a complaint with the inspector general of the intelligence community (IC IG), Michael Atkinson, who acknowledged he considered it a credible matter of "urgent concern" that necessitated notifying congressional oversight committees. But during a three-hour closed-door briefing, Atkinson told the House Intelligence Committee that the acting DNI, Joseph Maguire, has barred him from providing details of the complaint to Congress. Trump dismissed the concerns in a Twitter thread, calling the story "fake news," and noting that any time he speaks with foreign leaders by phone he is well aware that there are likely "many people" listening from US agencies.

GRETA THUNBERG: WORLD'S CLIMATE CONSCIENCE

She has sparked both hope and controversy around the planet, but Greta Thunberg understood climate change at an early age and has rallied youths and parents worldwide to her cause. In just over a year the now 16-year-old Swede's humble "climate strike" has become a global movement and set her up as a potential 2019 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Thunberg's struggle began quietly in August 2018 when she skipped school for the first three weeks, and then on Fridays to spend the day outside Sweden's parliament with a sign labelled "School strike for climate". Swedish media, at the time preoccupied by upcoming parliamentary elections, didn't pay much attention to the young girl's message at first. Most often seen wearing her hair in tightly knit braids, Greta diligently pursued her weekly sit-in even as temperatures plunged. "I'm planning to continue until Sweden is in line with the Paris agreement and that might take a while," she told AFP TV in late 2018. Her demands have attracted worldwide attention -- she has been asked to address global leaders and adorned the cover of international magazines such as Time and Vogue. Earlier this week, Greta and her Fridays for Future movement received Amnesty International's highest human rights award. In August, she crossed the Atlantic to New York in a two-week journey on a sailboat. She refuses to fly because of

the carbon emissions caused by airplanes. Around the world, young activists have heeded the call and modelled protests of their own after Greta's, leading to both praise and criticism. On Wednesday in Washington, she addressed a joint hearing of two House committees. "I don't want you to listen to me, I want you to listen to the scientists," she said. "I want you to then unite behind the science -- and then I want you to take real action." It was in school, when Greta Thunberg was eight or nine, that her interest in climate issues was first piqued. "My teachers told me that I should save paper and turn off the lights. I asked them why and they said because there's something called climate change and global warming, caused by humans," Greta told AFP. The notion was strange to the young girl, who felt that if

that was the case, "then we would not be talking about anything else". Since then she has stopped eating meat, drinking milk and buying new things, unless "absolutely necessary". Greta's family, who live in a spacious but cosy Stockholm apartment, has also made changes to their lifestyle. As an opera singer, her mother Malena Ernman used to travel the world, but she has bowed to her daughter and now performs only in Nordic countries. Her mother, father Svante Thunberg, an actor turned producer, and younger sister Beata became aware of how much the troubled climate weighed on Greta's shoulders when she became depressed. At age 11 Greta stopped eating, started missing school and even stopped talking as the "existential threat" of climate change loomed, her father said. When she was 12, Greta was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. "My brain works a bit differently so I see the world from a different perspective," Greta explained to AFP. "I am very direct, I say it the way it is, and when I decide to do something, I do it without doubt," she said, adding that she considers her condition a strength. Greta has taken a sabbatical from school this year after graduating from ninth grade in June with mostly A's. "We have to take the opportunity to act now because it may be too late in just a year," she warned in December.



SOURCE: AFP