

NEWSIN
brief

UK PM to meet EU
leaders in NY

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will hold talks with European leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York next week as part of his push to secure a Brexit deal by the end of October. Johnson is due to meet Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, European Council President Donald Tusk, French President Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Angela Merkel on Monday and Tuesday, a senior UK official said.

Attack kills 12 in
Iraqi Shia holy city

AFP, Karbala

Twelve civilians were killed and five were wounded Friday in a bomb blast on a bus at the northern edge of the Iraqi Shia holy city of Karbala, medical officials said. Security forces arrived quickly to the scene of the attack, which was not immediately claimed. Attacks have been rare in Karbala in recent years, but sleeper cells of the Islamic State group, which Iraq declared victory against in late 2017, continue to carry out attacks across the country.

US, El Salvador sign
asylum agreement

AFP, Washington

The United States and El Salvador reached an agreement Friday aimed at curbing illegal migration, opening the door for the US to potentially send refugees back to the violent Central American country. The agreement -- which will only go into effect after both countries have implemented new border security and asylum processes -- is the latest step by Donald Trump's administration to curb immigration to the US by leaning on neighbors to take in migrants.



An anti-government protester is pepper-sprayed during a clash with the police near Yuen Long station, in Hong Kong, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cops, protesters
clash again in HK

AFP, Hong Kong

Riot police and protesters in Hong Kong fought brief skirmishes near the Chinese border yesterday, the latest clashes during huge pro-democracy protests that have battered the financial hub for more than three months.

Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at small groups of hardcore activists who had built barricades in the outlying town of Tuen Mun, some of them lobbing bricks and at least one Molotov cocktail.

Multiple protesters were seen being arrested in the clashes, which were less sustained than the intense battles of previous weekends.

The city has been convulsed by months of huge, sometimes violent rallies calling for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability.

Yesterday's clashes were the 16th straight weekend of protests and skirmishes.

In a now familiar pattern, the day began with a peaceful rally through Tuen Mun, a town in Hong Kong's northwest, close to the border with mainland China.

At one point, a handful of protesters pulled down China's flag flying outside a local government office and burned it.

Tensions soon spiked after police snatch squads rushed into a park where crowds had gathered and made a series of arrests.

Hundreds of hardcore activists then built barricades and dismantled nearby fences to arm themselves with makeshift clubs. Objects were also thrown onto nearby train tracks.

But protesters showed little appetite in holding ground, quickly retreating as soon as tear gas and rubber bullets were fired by police.

By Saturday evening, pockets of demonstrators and police were playing a familiar game of cat and mouse.

‘Nothing was wrong’
Trump hits out at claims he asked Ukraine for Biden dirt

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump lashed back at his critics yesterday, as questions swirled in the latest scandal to hit his extraordinarily embattled White House.

"Nothing was said that was in any way wrong," Trump said of a phone call with Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which, according to the Wall Street Journal, the US president asked "about eight times" that the Ukrainian leader investigate the son of former Vice-President Joe Biden.

Biden is the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination. His son Hunter was on the board of a Ukrainian gas company while his father was vice-president.

Trump already faces impeachment inquiries but the Ukraine call is reported to be related to an intelligence community whistleblower complaint about the president's behaviour which is at the heart of a standoff between the White House and Congress.

Suspicious have focused on a July 25 call between Trump and Zelenskyy.

Trump's Democratic opponents

have been probing that call in connection with allegations Trump and his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani tried to pressure the Ukrainian administration to probe Hunter Biden.

When asked by reporters whether he discussed the Bidens with Zelenskyy, Trump said curtly: "It doesn't matter what I discuss."

But he did not deny having done so.



Biden -- who leads Trump according to most polls -- said the reports show the president's "willingness to abuse his power and abuse our country." He also said Trump should release the transcript of his conversation with Zelenskyy.

Adding yet another layer to the controversy, congressional policymakers were concerned the

Trump administration had been holding back military aid to Ukraine at the time. The aid was finally released last week.

Democratic lawmakers say a president conditioning foreign aid on providing dirt on a US election rival would amount to grounds for impeachment.

"The president can't use US aid as a weapon to serve his own political purposes," House Democrat Seth Moulton tweeted. "This is an impeachable offense if true."

Hillary Clinton weighed in Friday with a sharp critique.

"The president asked a foreign power to help him win an election. Again," she tweeted.

Presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren called for Trump's impeachment.

The whistleblower's complaint about Trump's behaviour was filed on 12 August. The US government's intelligence inspector general has called it "serious" and "urgent". On Friday Trump dismissed it, insisting "it's nothing ... just another political hack job".

Yemen rebels announce plan
to halt attacks on Saudi Arabia

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's Huthi rebels unexpectedly announced late Friday that they planned to halt all attacks on Saudi Arabia as part of a peace initiative to end their country's devastating conflict, five years after they captured the capital Sanaa.

The announcement comes after a wave of drone strikes last weekend on Saudi oil installations knocked out half of the kingdom's production and sent shock waves through energy markets.

The Iran-backed Huthis claimed responsibility for the attacks, but Riyadh's ally Washington has condemned them as an "act of war", placing the blame on Tehran and announcing new sanctions against the Islamic republic.

Mehdi al-Mashat, head of the Huthis' supreme political council, announced in a speech marking the 2014 rebel seizure of Sanaa "the halt of all attacks against the territory of Saudi Arabia".

He added that he hoped "the gesture

would be answered by a stronger gesture" from the Saudis, according to the rebels' Al-Masirah television channel.

"Pursuing war is not in anyone's interest."

Yemen's conflict has since killed tens of thousands of people -- most of them civilians -- and driven millions more to the brink of famine in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The plan calls for rebels to "stop all attacks on Saudi territory by drones, ballistic missiles and other means", he said.

He also called for the reopening of Sanaa's international airport and open access to Yemen's Red Sea port of Hodeida, a crucial entry point for imports and humanitarian aid.

The announcement was a sharp reversal from previous statements from the Huthis, who early on Friday had accused Saudi Arabia and its allies of endangering the fragile truce around Hodeida with strikes on four rebel targets north of the port.



Dozens arrested in Egypt
after anti-Sisi protests

AFP, Cairo

Rare small protests were staged overnight in Cairo and other Egyptian cities calling for the removal of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, but authorities quickly dispersed them and arrested dozens, a security source said.

Hundreds of citizens took to the streets late Friday to protest, chanting slogans including "Leave, Sisi!" and holding up placards.

At least 74 were arrested overnight, a security source told AFP, with plain clothed police patrolling sidestreets of downtown Cairo.

The country effectively banned protests under a 2013 law and a state of emergency is still in full effect.

Police fired tear gas and deployed forces in Tahrir Square - the epicentre of the 2011 revolution that unseated long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

The protests came on the back of an online call put out by Mohamed Aly, a disgruntled exiled Egyptian businessman, demanding Sisi be toppled.

The construction contractor has been posting videos from Spain that have gone viral since early September, accusing Sisi and the military of rampant corruption.

The president flatly denied the allegations last week at a youth conference and sought to assure Egyptians that he "was honest and faithful" to his people and the military.

Thousands shared footage on social media documenting the demonstrations that sprang up in several cities including sizeable crowds blocking traffic in Alexandria, Al-Mahalla, Damietta, Mansoura and Suez.

Under the rule of general-turned-president Sisi, authorities have launched a broad crackdown on dissidents, jailing thousands of Islamists as well as secular activists and popular bloggers. He led the military ouster of former Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and won back to back landslide elections running virtually unopposed.



Egyptian protesters shout slogans as they take part in a protest calling for the removal of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo's downtown, late on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Two Indian states to hold
elections in October

Two Indian states will go to the polls in October, the election commissioner said yesterday, in a test of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity after he won a clear mandate in a general election in May. The state assembly elections come after economic growth slipped to a six-year low in the April-June quarter, leading to major job losses, fuelling discontent in the countryside. Voting in the northern state of Haryana and western state of Maharashtra, home to the financial hub of Mumbai, will be on Oct 21, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said. Votes will be counted on Oct. 24, he said. Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in power in both of the states.

Snubbing Taiwan, Solomon
Islands establish China ties

China and the Solomon Islands signed an agreement yesterday to establish diplomatic ties after the Pacific island nation ditched relations with Taiwan, which Beijing claims as a Chinese province and seeks to cut off from the international community. The Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councillor Wang Yi, signed the agreement with Solomon Islands' Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele at a government guest house in Beijing in front of reporters. China this week won over two former Taiwanese allies, Solomon Islands and Kiribati, in a setback for the self-ruled island that finds itself further isolated amid continued pressure from Beijing.

Dozens arrested in Paris
'yellow vest' protests



French police fired tear gas and made dozens of arrests yesterday as they dispersed groups of "yellow vest" protesters attempting to stage unauthorised rallies in central Paris. The government deployed a massive police presence as it feared yellow-vest supporters would take advantage of authorised protests over climate change and pension reform to cause disruption in the French capital. Police had made 90 arrests in Paris by around midday local time (1000 GMT) and pushed back around one hundred protesters attempting to gather on the Champs-Élysées shopping avenue, the Paris police prefecture said. The yellow vest protesters, named after motorists' high-visibility jackets, emerged late last year, triggered by fuel tax rises and swelling into a revolt against President Emmanuel Macron's style of government.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Maldives is not
mired in a China
debt trap: Wang

REUTERS, Beijing

The Maldives are not "mired in a Chinese debt trap", the Chinese government's top diplomat told the visiting Maldivian foreign minister, amid fears in the Indian Ocean country of debts as high as \$3 billion owing to Beijing.

The Indian Ocean island chain has been caught in a battle for influence between India and China, which invested millions of dollars during the rule of the pro-China former leader Abdulla Yameen as part of China's Belt and Road plan, designed to improve its global trade reach.

Meeting Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid in Beijing, Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi said China's cooperation with the Maldives would not be affected by the change of government.

The Chinese statement quoted Shahid as saying no country in the world had been as generous to helping the Maldives like China, pointing to the building of infrastructure and "provision of a large amount of aid and loans".

HECKLING OF UNION MINISTER AT JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

BJP slams 'terrorist' students

STAR INTERNATIONAL DESK

The heckling and manhandling of India's junior minister for Environment and Climate Change Babul Supriyo by a section of students at Jadavpur University on Thursday has become the latest flash-point between Bharatiya Janata Party and the state's ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal.

Describing a section of JU students as "nothing less than terrorists", West Bengal BJP President Dilip Ghosh on Friday said there should be a Balakot-like surgical strike to "destroy anti-national hubs in JU campus". The ruling TMC, meanwhile, directed its criticism at the state governor for rushing to the university, and expressed solidarity with the VC and students of JU.

The protest against the minister was held by workers of pro-CPI(M) students unions of the

West Bengal BJP chief vows 'surgical strike on anti-nat'l hubs'; TMC stands 'in solidarity with VC and students'

Noted personalities, teachers condemn minister's behaviors with VC, students



University when Supriyo had gone to address a seminar organized by Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), affiliated to the RSS, the BJP's ideological mentor.

As the news of heckling of Supriyo spread, a group of youth wielding sticks and iron rods, stated to be ABVP activists, reached the Jadavpur University, ransacked the students' union office.

State Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar also rushed to JU. The minister was eventually escorted out of the campus after 5 hours

with the help of police.

A day after the heckling of Supriyo who was also pulled by his hairs, Ghosh said, "No one has given anyone the right to lay hands on a minister. We know how to break their hands and soon we will do it."

He also demanded immediate resignation of JU Vice-Chancellor Suranjan Das for allegedly failing to control the situation.

Meanwhile, the Jadavpur University Teachers Association condemned the way a union minister talked to the VC during the

agitation by students and alleged his behavior insulted the entire fraternity of University. It said the agitating students should not have been "provoked" by some of the "objectionable" comments and gestures of the minister.

A group of 15 prominent personalities, including film director Aparna Sen, expressed concern over the minister's behaviour with the VC and the conduct of Supriyo's security personnel with the students.

Jadavpur University in southern suburb of Kolkata has for long been a stronghold of pro-Left student unions. Our News Delhi correspondent said Thursday's incident might help the ABVP to gain a toe-hold in the university.

Ahead of the state assembly elections due in 2021, experts say, violence between the BJP and joint front of the Left and Trinamool Congress is likely to go up in the coming months.