

NEWSIN brief

More than 1000 anti-Sisi protesters arrested

AFP, Cairo
Egyptian authorities have arrested more than 1,000 people, two rights groups said yesterday, in the wake of rare protests last week calling for the ouster of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The Egyptian Centre for Freedoms and Rights said 1,003 had been arrested, while the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights reported the figure of 1,298 detained. Two prominent academics were also detained on Tuesday, a lawyer and a relative said.

US air strike kills 11 in Libya

REUTERS, Cairo
US forces yesterday said they had killed 11 suspected militants linked to Islamic State in their second air strike near the southern Libyan town of Murzuq in less than a week. The attack, carried out on Tuesday, followed a Sept. 19 strike that the US said had killed eight suspected militants. Some Islamic State militants retreated south into Libya's desert as the group lost its stronghold in the coastal city of Sirte at the end of 2016.

Jihadists execute aid worker in Nigeria

AFP, Maiduguri
Jihadists aligned to the so-called Islamic State group have executed one of six aid workers abducted in July in northeast Nigeria, charity group Action Against Hunger said yesterday. The six Nigerian aid workers -- one woman and five men -- were seized by jihadists affiliated to the Islamic State group during an ambush on their convoy close to the border with Niger on July 18. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group is a splinter faction of jihadist group Boko Haram that swore allegiance in 2016 to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

No Iran breakthrough at UN

Rouhani rules out talks under pressure as US intensifies sanctions

AFP, United Nations

Iran's president yesterday closed the door on meeting Donald Trump despite last-minute European efforts to ease tensions as the United States again ramped up punishing sanctions. French President Emmanuel Macron had shuttled between his US and Iranian counterparts over two days at the United Nations, trying to arrange a historic encounter that he hoped could reduce the risk of all-out war in the Middle East. But Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, addressing the UN General Assembly, said he would refuse talks so long as the United States maintains its economic pressure. "I would like to announce that our response to any negotiation under sanctions is negative," Rouhani said. He dismissed the idea of a photo-op with Trump, who is fond of drama and held three made-for-television meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "Memento photos are the final stage of negotiations, not the first one," he said. He doubted the sincerity of the Trump administration to negotiate, pointing to officials' boasts of applying "the harshest sanctions in history" against Iran. "How can someone believe them when the silent killing of a great nation, and pressure



Hassan Rouhani shakes hands with UN chief Antonio Guterres during the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

on the lives of 83 million Iranians, especially women and children, are welcomed by American government officials?" "The Iranian nation will never, ever forget and forgive these crimes and these criminals," he said. Trump had already ruled out easing economic pressure and, hours before Rouhani's speech, his administration said it

was stepping up sanctions. On Trump's last scheduled day at the annual UN summit of world leaders, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States would punish Chinese companies and their chief executives for buying Iranian oil. "We're telling China, and all nations -- know that we will sanction every violation of sanctions of all activity," Pompeo told

a pressure group opposed to Iran's clerical regime on the sidelines of the United Nations. China, which is embroiled in a trade war as well as myriad other disputes with the United States, is believed to be the biggest foreign buyer of Iranian oil. The Trump administration in May said it would unilaterally force all countries to stop buying Iran's oil, its major export, sending tensions soaring. The United States blamed Iran for an attack earlier this month on the oil infrastructure of rival Saudi Arabia, which is also waging a devastating offensive in Yemen. France, Britain and Germany this week said they agreed with the US findings. But the European powers, while criticizing Iran, believe that diplomacy is the best way forward. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini acknowledged struggles to preserve the pact, from which Iran has stopped strict compliance as it presses for economic benefits. "I will not hide that it is increasingly difficult to do it," she told reporters after talks among European powers. "We will try and continue keeping the agreement in place and overcome the difficulties we are facing," she said.

Violence rocks Afghanistan as campaign ends

AFP, Kandahar

Candidates in Afghanistan's presidential election pushed their messages for the last time yesterday as campaigning for weekend polls wrapped up amid deadly violence. The bloodshed that has marred the election since day one showed no sign of abating, with fresh blasts targeting the campaign offices of President Ashraf Ghani, including one late Tuesday that killed a local journalist. After two days of no campaigning on Thursday and Friday, Afghans head to the polls Saturday to decide whether Ghani -- who was elected in 2014 -- should be awarded a second term. Eighteen names appear on the ballot but the only other candidate thought to have a chance is Ghani's main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's "chief executive" who was awarded the role after 2014's bitter election.



Israeli forces keep watch as a bulldozer demolishes a Palestinian house on the outskirts of Dura village near the West Bank town of Hebron yesterday as it was reportedly built without Israeli authorisation in the "Area C". PHOTO: AFP

Pak quake death toll rises to 38

Rescuers scramble to reach survivors in PoK

AFP, Jatlan

Rescuers battled along badly damaged roads and combed through toppled buildings yesterday to reach victims of an earthquake that killed at least 38 people and injured hundreds more in northeast Pakistan. Authorities were still assessing the quake's impact in villages around the city of Mirpur in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, but in some the immediate damage was evident. After a night of heavy rain compounded the misery of survivors, hundreds gathered to attend the funerals of residents killed near Mirpur, about 130 kilometres (80 miles) southeast of the capital, Islamabad. "It was like doomsday for us. We lost a number of our near and dear ones," Muhammad Azam told AFP at a funeral for a neighbour. "Our loved ones will never come back." The 5.2 magnitude quake was not as strong as several that have struck Pakistan over the years, but the epicentre was very shallow -- which generally causes more damage. Near Mirpur, a well-developed city known for its palatial residences, many roads were destroyed, while bridges, mobile phone towers and electricity poles were also badly damaged. The village of Jatlan on the outskirts of Mirpur appeared to be one of the worst affected. There, residents sifted through debris and assessed the damage, with large cracks defacing walls in the houses that still stood, and brick fences reduced to rubble.

'Media is lying' Says Bolsonaro on Amazon fires

AFP, United Nations

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro said Tuesday it was a lie that the Amazon was being devastated by fire and accused countries critical of him of having a "colonialist spirit." Speaking first at this year's UN General Assembly, the far-right leader also heaped praise on his American counterpart Donald Trump for respecting his country's sovereignty. The speech came a week after a Human Rights Watch report that accused Bolsonaro of giving a "green light" to illegal loggers and failing to protect those defending the world's largest rainforest. "The Amazon is not being devastated or consumed by fire. The media is lying," said Bolsonaro, whose 32-minute speech went more than double his allotted time. "It is a fallacy to say that the Amazon is the heritage of humankind, and a misconception confirmed by scientists to say that our Amazon forests are the lungs of the world," he said. Bolsonaro also hit out at his detractors, saying that while every country had problems, sensational reporting in the international media "aroused our patriotic sentiments." France and Ireland have threatened to block a trade deal between the EU and South American countries including Brazil. Bolsonaro by contrast said he was grateful to Trump, "who summed up the spirit that should prevail among United Nation member countries: respect for the freedom and sovereignty of each of the member countries."

Oust me or let me deliver

Says defiant UK PM as parliament reconvenes after court order; Corbyn says Brexit extension first, then election

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday challenged opposition MPs to call a confidence vote in his government, after the Supreme Court struck down his decision to suspend parliament in the run-up to Brexit. The ruling by Britain's highest court on Tuesday that the suspension was unlawful was a stunning blow to Johnson's authority just weeks before the country is due leave the European Union on October 31. But the Conservative leader showed no contrition as he faced MPs in the House of Commons, which had hastily reconvened yesterday. He condemned the verdict as "wrong" and, faced with calls to resign, challenged the main opposition Labour Party and others to call an immediate confidence vote. "They have until the house rises today to table a motion of no confidence in the government, and we can have that vote tomorrow," he said. "Will they have the courage to act or



will they refuse to take responsibility and do nothing but dither and delay... what are they scared of? "Come on, then." However, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said that while he wanted Johnson to resign, he would not back an election until the PM's threat of leaving the EU without a divorce deal was removed. In the week before parliament was suspended earlier this month, MPs pushed through a law requiring the premier to delay Brexit by three months if he cannot strike exit terms with Brussels in time.

Johnson, who only took office in July, says he suspended parliament for five weeks until October 14 to allow his new government to launch a fresh legislative programme. But critics accused him of trying to silence MPs, the majority of whom object to his threat to leave the EU without a deal if one cannot be struck with Brussels. On Tuesday, 11 Supreme Court judges unanimously ruled that Johnson's decision to advise Queen Elizabeth II to suspend parliament was unlawful. Johnson, who flew back early from the UN General Assembly in New York to address the newly resumed parliament, accused MPs of trying to undermining the 2016 Brexit vote. Johnson has already tried twice to call an early election hoping to take advantage of opinion polls showing voters like his tough Brexit stance. However, a snap election requires support of two-thirds of MPs, and Johnson does not have even a simple majority in the 650-seat House of Commons.

Improve ties with Pakistan

Trump encourages Modi during talks on sidelines of UNGA, urges him to fulfil his promise to better lives of Kashmiris

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump "encouraged" Prime Minister Narendra Modi to improve relations with Pakistan and fulfil his promise to better the lives of the Kashmiri people, according to a readout issued by the Prime Minister Modi and President Trump met on Tuesday on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly session. Their 40-minute talks mainly focused on the bilateral trade and issues related to terrorism emanating from Pakistan. President Trump noted good progress on defence and security cooperation, the readout said. "Additionally, the President encouraged Prime Minister Modi to improve relations with Pakistan and fulfil his promise to better the lives of the Kashmiri people," it added. Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said the Prime Minister explained in detail to President Trump the challenges faced by India due to terrorism, especially in Jammu



and Kashmir. He told President Trump that 42,000 lives have been lost in the last 30 years due to terrorism in Kashmir and sought the support from the international community to fight the scourge of terrorism, Gokhale told reporters at a briefing, reported PTI. "We expect that the overtures the Prime Minister has made over the years ought to have been reciprocated and none of them have been reciprocated, beginning

with Prime Minister's invitation of the oath taking ceremony and then as Prime Minister said his unique trip to Lahore in December 2015 with minimum security," Gokhale said. He added that Prime Minister Modi explained to President Trump that immediately after his visit to Lahore in 2015, there was an attack on the Pathankot Airbase and Pakistan has not brought the perpetrators of the crime to justice. Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said Tuesday Trump had asked him to mediate with Iran to defuse tensions, though the US president later suggested it was Khan who approached him and nothing was final, reported AFP. Khan met Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of this week's United Nations General Assembly. "Trump asked me that if we could de-escalate the situation and maybe come up with another deal," Khan told reporters at the gathering of world leaders in New York.

2m children out of school in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Two million children are out of school in war-torn Yemen, a fourth of whom have dropped out since the conflict escalated in March 2015, the UN children's agency said yesterday. The education of a further 3.7 million children is at risk as teachers' salaries have not been paid in more than two years, Unicef said in a statement. "Violence, displacement and attacks on schools are preventing many children from accessing school," said Sara Beysolow Nyanti, Unicef representative in Yemen. One in five schools in the country can no longer be used as a direct result of the conflict that has devastated Yemen's already fragile education system, the UN agency says. "Children out of school face increased risks of all forms of exploitation including being forced to join the fighting, child labour and early marriage," Nyanti said. "They lose the opportunity to develop and grow in a caring and stimulating environment, ultimately becoming trapped in a life of poverty and hardship." Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed since Saudi Arabia and its allies intervened in March 2015 in support of the beleaguered government after the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels captured the capital Sanaa. The fighting has displaced millions and left 24.1 million -- more than two-thirds of the population -- in need of aid.

Dozens of Hong Kong protesters appear in court

Dozens of Hong Kong anti-government protesters appeared in court yesterday charged with rioting and other offences over violent clashes two months ago near China's main representative office. Violence has hit parts of Hong Kong at different times over the last three months. But pictures of petrol bombs and street clashes broadcast worldwide present a huge embarrassment for Beijing before the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic on Oct 1. The court on Wednesday adjourned the case until Nov. 19 after prosecutors said they needed more time to study 35 hours of video, including police, online and CCTV footage. The 44 defendants were released on bail.

Facebook exempts political speech from fact-checking

Facebook will not fact-check the statements politicians post to the site, the social network announced Tuesday ahead of the US 2020 elections, even as it works to discredit false information meant to manipulate public opinion. Worries have run high ahead of the November 2020 polls following revelations of a wide-ranging misinformation campaign on Facebook and other social platforms, largely directed by Russian operatives, in the 2016 elections. Overwhelmed by such disinformation, Facebook has set up partnerships with media outlets to verify articles and posts found to be of a dubious nature, with journalists' contributions appearing below problematic content, which is labeled as doubtful. However, Facebook will demote previously debunked content.

Greta Thunberg wins 'alternative Nobel Prize'

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg yesterday won the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes called the "alternative Nobel Prize", the jury for the Swedish human rights prize said. Thunberg's global climate movement "Fridays for Future" began in August 2018 when she started sitting alone outside Sweden's parliament with her now iconic sign reading "school strike for the climate". The message has struck a chord with youths around the world. The Right Livelihood Award was created in 1980 by Swedish-German philatelist Jakob von Uexkull after the Nobel Foundation behind the Nobel Prizes refused to create awards honouring efforts in the fields of the environment and international development. SOURCE: AFP

