

NEWS IN
brief

Trump's bid to detain migrant kids blocked

AFP, Los Angeles

A federal judge in California on Friday blocked a bid by the Trump administration that would have allowed for undocumented migrant children to be detained indefinitely. The decision by US District Judge Dolly Gee relates to the so-called Flores Agreement which stipulates that the government could not detain migrant children for more than 20 days.

Tanker freed by Iran docks in Dubai

REUTERS, Dubai/Stockholm

A British-flagged tanker that was detained by Iran for 10 weeks, docked in Dubai yesterday, after a standoff that has stoked tensions along a vital global shipping route for oil. The Stena Impero, which sailed out of Iranian waters on Friday, was seized by Iran's Revolutionary Guards on July 19, shortly after British forces detained an Iranian tanker off the territory of Gibraltar. The Iranian ship was released in August.

China, Kiribati establish diplomatic relations

AFP, Beijing

China and Kiribati have established diplomatic relations, Chinese state media reported yesterday, days after the tiny Pacific island nation severed ties with Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Kiribati's President Taneti Mamau on Friday signed a joint communiqué to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries on the sidelines of the UN climate summit, Xinhua reported. Recently, the Solomon Islands also dropped diplomatic ties with Taiwan. And it leaves the self-ruled island more isolated than ever with just 15 states left that recognise it.



Led by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (C), young activists and their supporters rally for action on climate change on Friday in Montreal, Canada. Hundreds of thousands of youths demonstrated across European cities and in Canada in the second in a global series of protests to avert a climate catastrophe.

PHOTO: AFP

ANTI-SISI PROTESTS

Rival rallies hit Egypt cities

AFP, Cairo

Scattered protests broke out Friday in Egyptian cities against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as his supporters also took to the streets in counter demonstrations a week after rare anti-Sisi rallies shook the country.

Police blocked streets leading to Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square, the epicentre of the 2011 revolution that ousted longtime-autocrat Hosni Mubarak, after calls by exiled businessman Mohamed Aly for a "million-man march".

Construction magnate Aly's viral videos accusing Sisi and the military of corruption sparked shock protests against the president last weekend, with hundreds taking to streets across the country calling for Sisi's ouster.

But the security forces have since moved swiftly to snuff out further dissent, arresting nearly 2,000 people in several days, rights groups said.

In mixed signals from Washington, a US official on Friday expressed support for "the right of Egyptians to express their political views freely, the right to associate, the right to peaceful political protest".

The call by the official, who requested anonymity, was at odds with the tone set by President Donald Trump who met Sisi at the United Nations in New York on Monday and said he was "not concerned at all" by the demonstrations.

Elected president in 2014, a year after pushing predecessor Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood from power, Sisi is seen by many as one of the most authoritarian figures in the Middle East.

And after arriving home from New York, Sisi insisted Friday that there was no cause for alarm.

PAKISTAN PM'S 'BLOODBATH' SPEECH AT UN

Restrictions tightened in J&K

Six militants, one Indian troop killed in two incidents

REUTERS, Srinagar

Authorities in Indian Kashmir tightened restrictions on people's movements yesterday to prevent possible protests following a speech by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

In an address to the United Nations General Assembly on Friday, Khan warned of a bloodbath once India lifts its restrictions in Kashmir, which have been in force since it revoked the region's decades-old autonomy in August and detained thousands of people.

Soon after the speech, hundreds of Kashmiris came out of their homes, shouting slogans in support of Khan late on Friday night and calling for the independence of Kashmir.

Muslim-majority Kashmir has long been a flashpoint between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which have fought two of their three wars over the divided territory. Both countries rule parts of Kashmir while claiming it in full.

Yesterday, police vans fitted with speakers made public announcements in some parts of Srinagar about movement restrictions, while additional troops were deployed to prevent protests, according to officials and two witnesses.

The troops also blocked access to the main business

centre of Srinagar with razor wire.

"This was necessitated after protests across Srinagar city last night soon after Imran Khan's speech," said a police official, who declined to be identified.

Two Indian officials said six militants and one Indian soldier had been killed in two separate incidents in the state, two officials said.

Three militants were killed in Ganderbal, about 12 miles (19 km) north of Srinagar, according to one of the officials, who declined to be named. Another three were killed in Batote, located on the highway connecting Jammu and Srinagar, Indian defence spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Devender Anand said.

India's crackdown as it revoked Kashmir's special status was accompanied by severe restrictions on movement, as well as disconnection of telephone services. Though New Delhi has eased some of the movement curbs, no prominent detainees have been freed and mobile and internet connections remain suspended.

While warning of the consequences of lifting what he described as an "inhuman curfew," Pakistani premier Khan demanded India do so and free all detainees.



'They are threatened by us'

Greta Thunberg says climate movement now 'too loud to handle' for Trump, critics

REUTERS, Montreal/The Hague

Teenage activist Greta Thunberg hit back at critics including US President Donald Trump on Friday, saying their mockery of children shows her message has become "too loud to handle".

The 16-year-old Swede also told a huge Montreal rally that world leaders had disappointed young people with empty words and inadequate plans.

"Today we are millions around the world, striking and marching again, and we will keep on doing it until they listen," Thunberg told a crowd that organizers estimated to be about half a million people in the Canadian city.

Trump mocked Thunberg this week and Canadian Member of Parliament Maxime Bernier called her alarmist and mentally unstable.

"I guess they must feel like their world view or their interests or whatever... is threatened by us. We've become too loud for people to handle so they try to silence us," she told reporters before the rally. "We should also take that as a compliment."

On Friday, the climate strikes she

inspired started in Asia and continued in Europe after similar strikes a week earlier. Tens of thousands of students kicked things off in New Zealand.

About 500 students in the South Korean capital, Seoul, urged more government action to address climate change, marching towards the presidential Blue House after a downtown rally, where they said the government gets an "F" in climate action.

Thousands of Dutch children also skipped school to join a global climate strike on Friday, blocking traffic and asking their leaders "how dare you?" in a reference to Thunberg's speech at the United Nations.

Thunberg's presence in Canada coincides with campaigning ahead of an Oct. 21 federal election. She met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau privately for about 15 minutes.

Later she was asked what her message to Trudeau had been. "He is of course obviously not doing enough but... this is such a huge problem," she said. "My message to all the politicians is the same, to just listen to the science, act on the science."



Taliban cut off his finger for voting, he defied them again

REUTERS, Kabul

The Taliban cut off Safiullah Safi's right forefinger for voting in 2014. That did not stop the businessman from doing it again.

Safi's act of defiance in Afghanistan's 2019 presidential elections yesterday sparked admiration after a photo of the 38-year old was posted on Twitter showing his missing right forefinger and the left one stained with indelible ink, indicating he had voted.

Braving the threat of militant attacks and delays at polling booths, Afghans cast their ballots in a major test of the Western-backed government's ability to protect democracy.

The Taliban regime was overthrown by US-led forces in 2001. But the Islamic insurgency is now at its most powerful since its defeat, violently disrupting the nascent democracy's elections and carrying out gruesome, often deadly

retribution on those who take part.

During the 2014 presidential vote, Taliban fighters cut off the fingers of at least six voters.

"I know it was a painful experience, but it was only a finger," Safi said by telephone. "When it comes to the future of my children and country I will not sit back even if they cut off my whole hand."

Safi described how in 2014 he had cast his vote and a day later travelled from the capital Kabul, where he lives, to the eastern city of Khost, his finger marked by the ink

from voting. "The Taliban took me out of the car and away from the road where they set up a court," he said.

"They cut off my finger, asking why I had taken part in the election despite their warning... My family told me to not do it this time, but instead I took them all to cast our votes."



An Independent Election Commission (IEC) official (L) helps a burqa-clad woman to cast her vote at a polling station in Herat, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



At least 44 killed in north India floods

At least 44 people were killed and thousands moved to relief camps because of flooding caused by torrential rains in northern India's Uttar Pradesh state, officials told AFP yesterday. Densely populated regions on the banks of two main rivers in the state, which are overflowing because of incessant rainfall in the last 24-48 hours, are among the worst hit. Officials and local media reports said most people lost their lives for a variety of reasons including wall collapses, drowning, lightning and snake bites. Flash floods after heavy rains killed at least 17 people in western India's Maharashtra state earlier this week.

China aims to join global arms treaty soon: Wang Yi

China wants to join as soon as possible an international arms treaty that the United States has spurned, the Foreign Ministry said on Saturday, adding it was China's responsibility to take part as a member of the international community. US President Donald Trump has said he intends to revoke the US signature to the treaty, which regulates the \$70 billion global cross-border trade in conventional arms and seeks to keep weapons out of the hands of human rights abusers. So far, 104 countries have joined the pact, which the General Assembly approved in 2013.

Clashes as HK marks 5 yrs since 'Umbrella' protests



Renewed clashes broke out in Hong Kong yesterday night as police used water cannon and tear gas to disperse hardcore protesters hurling Molotovs and bricks after tens of thousands rallied peacefully in a nearby park. Huge crowds had gathered to mark the fifth anniversary of the "Umbrella Movement", the failed pro-democracy campaign that laid the groundwork for the massive protests currently engulfing the finance hub. Tens of thousands crammed into a park outside the city's parliament, the same site that was the epicentre of the 2014 protests.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

White House restricted access to Putin, MBS transcripts: report

AGENCIES

The White House restricted access to the transcripts of US President Donald Trump's calls containing sensitive conversations with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and the leaders of Saudi Arabia, according to a media report.

Following the practice put in place after previous leaks, the documents were concealed in the ultra-secure computer system accessible with only the highest security access. The New York Times reported late on Friday, citing current and former officials.

"The Saudi calls placed in the restricted system were with King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman [MBS] and Prince Khalid bin Salman, who at the time was the Saudi ambassador to the United States," the report said.

Several current and former officials said it made sense to restrict the calls given the number of leaks from the White House, it added.

Separately, the Washington Post reported on Friday that in 2017, Trump told Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak that he was not bothered by Moscow's meddling in the 2016 US elections because the US did the same in other countries.



anonymity, the Washington Post said the meeting was held just one day after Trump fired his FBI director James Comey, with the US president telling Lavrov and Kislyak that the sacking had relieved him of "great pressure".

The revelations come the same week a whistleblower report concerning a phone call between Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky rocked Washington.

The whistleblower has said a transcript of the phone call was placed into an ultra-secure system for highly-classified information. The transcript was of a conversation in which Trump urged Zelensky to investigate the son of Joe Biden, the US president's main Democratic rival.

The disclosures have prompted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to launch an impeachment inquiry against Trump.

In a statement to CNN, the White House said on Friday that the move to place the transcript in the system came at the direction of National Security Council (NSC) lawyers.

White House officials say the transcript was already classified so it did nothing wrong by moving it to another system. They did not elaborate on why it was classified even though the conversation did not include state secrets.

At UN, Malaysia PM seeks to curb use of sanctions

AFP, United Nations

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Friday urged greater international control of sanctions, criticizing US attempts to force all countries to stop doing business with Iran.

"We do not know under what laws sanctions are applied. It appears to be the privilege of the rich and the powerful," the outspoken 94-year-old leader said in an address to the UN General Assembly.

"If you want to have sanctions, let us have a law to govern them," he said.

"The fact is that when sanctions are applied to a country, other countries get sanctioned as well. Malaysia and many others lost a big market when sanctions were applied on Iran."

The United States has increasingly used sanctions as a diplomatic tool, with President Donald Trump threatening other nations with punishment if they buy any oil from Iran.

Seeking to curb Iran's regional influence, Trump unilaterally imposed the sanctions

after walking away from a multinational nuclear deal.

Speaking to reporters after his address, Mahathir acknowledged that Malaysian firms had little choice but to comply for fear of being hit by US sanctions.

"Generally, the world is helpless," he said.

Mahathir also renewed his criticism of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an 11-nation trade pact that includes Malaysia but from which Trump pulled the United States.

"Rich companies had given themselves the power to sue governments. The terms of the agreement were drawn up by them -- and they are not all like Bill Gates, who spends some money on charity," he said.

Mahathir called for a renegotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership after his election last year. The deal had been sealed shortly before the surprise return to power of Mahathir, who had led Malaysia for more than two decades before his retirement in 2003.

