

NEWSIN  
brief

25 Mali soldiers  
killed in clashes

At least 25 Malian soldiers have been killed and about 60 are missing after jihadists attacked two military posts in the country's fragile central region, the Malian government said yesterday. The military camps came under attack on Monday at Boulkessy and Mondoro, towns near the border with Burkina Faso, and intense fighting continued on Tuesday with Malian troops backed by air support, sources said. The Malian army said they have regained control of the towns.

Netanyahu fights  
for political life

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began his final attempt to fend off a corruption indictment yesterday when his lawyers argued against looming charges that have combined with election stalemate to threaten his long hold on power. The pre-trial hearings, scheduled to be held over four days, will allow him to make his case against indictment to Attorney-General (AG) Avichai Mandelblit in three graft investigations. A final decision by the AG on whether to file charges is expected by the end of 2019.

Ship sweeps first  
Pacific plastic

A special ship designed to clean the oceans has harvested its first plastic from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch since setting sail from San Francisco last month, its Dutch inventor said yesterday. The project by The Ocean Cleanup, a Dutch non-profit group, involves a supply ship towing a floating boom that corrals marine plastic with the aim of cleaning half of the infamous patch within five years.



Hatice Cengiz (C), the fiancée of murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, CEO of Amazon and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos (L-4), Yemeni Nobel Prize winner Tawakkol Karman (L-3) and participants stand nearby a memorial stone during an event marking one-year of the assassination of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

KHASHOGGI MURDER ANNIVERSARY

Rights groups  
demand justice

International human rights groups demanded justice yesterday for slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, saying that a year after his brutal murder, Saudi authorities had yet to provide any "meaningful accountability". The rights watchdogs also called on Riyadh to release the numerous government critics who remain in custody. Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist, was killed and dismembered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, in an operation that reportedly involved 15 agents sent from Riyadh. His body was never found. Eleven suspects have been on trial in Riyadh, with five of them facing the death penalty, but hearings are held behind closed doors and the names of the defendants have not been released. Human Rights Watch criticised recent comments by the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in which he accepted collective responsibility for Khashoggi's murder, but denied he was personally to blame. "If he's serious, the crown prince and his government should provide transparency into the ongoing trial and reveal everything they know about the planning, execution, and aftermath of Khashoggi's murder," HRW's Middle East director, Sarah Leah Whitson, said. In a letter to King Salman, echoing Amnesty International, the Vienna-based International Press Institute demanded a transparent trial for those implicated in Khashoggi's murder. The grisly details of Khashoggi's murder, which emerged largely from Turkish sources, sparked a global outcry and turned Prince Mohammad into a virtual pariah.

'It is a coup'  
Trump denounces impeachment inquiry; Putin finds 'nothing compromising' in transcripts of phone call

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump on Tuesday denounced the impeachment inquiry threatening his presidency as a "coup," as his administration pushed back hard against the investigation. Trump's comments came after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vowed to prevent or delay five State Department officials from testifying in the investigation probing accusations that Trump abused his office by seeking dirt from Ukraine on a 2020 election rival. "As I learn more and more each day, I am coming to the conclusion that what is taking place is not an impeachment, it is a COUP," Trump tweeted. It is "intended to take away the Power of the People, their VOTE, their Freedoms, their Second Amendment, Religion, Military, Border Wall, and their God-given rights."

Meanwhile, Russian President

Vladimir Putin yesterday defended Trump, saying there was "nothing compromising" in transcripts of the call. "I see nothing compromising in the conversation between Trump

Pompeo vows to prevent state department officials from testifying

Democrats accuse Pompeo of 'stonewalling' the probe



and (Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky)," Putin said of the phone call that has sparked an impeachment probe in the US. Pompeo meanwhile accused three Democratic House committee heads conducting the impeachment inquiry of "an attempt to intimidate, bully and treat improperly the distinguished

professionals of the Department of State." But Democrats accused the top US diplomat of "stonewalling" the investigation and, according to media reports, scheduled interviews with at least two of the diplomats who both had direct involvement in the Ukraine matter. Trump faces the possibility of becoming only the third president ever impeached by Congress, which could lead to his going on trial in the Senate. Democrats decided last week to seek impeachment after a whistleblower complaint, supported by a White House call transcript, showed Trump pressuring Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky to supply him with politically useful information on Democratic former vice president Joe Biden. Biden is the most likely Democrat to challenge Trump's re-election bid next year.

UK floats new Brexit plan  
to avoid Irish backstop

AFP, London

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday proposed a new Brexit plan aimed at removing the need for customs checks at the Irish border, calling the EU-backed approach a "bridge to nowhere". Johnson's plan, published by the UK government, says the revised agreement "should make a firm commitment to avoiding customs checks, regulatory checks, or related physical infrastructure at the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland". In an accompanying letter to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Johnson says his deal "removes the so-called backstop," an EU-backed plan that ensures the Irish border stays open by keeping Britain temporarily aligned to EU customs rules. The UK parliament rejected the old Brexit agreement three times because of the backstop provision. "The proposed 'backstop' is a bridge to



nowhere, and a new way forward must be found," Johnson's letter to Juncker says. Johnson said his plan is built on preserving the Good Friday agreement that ended decades of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in which thousands died. That deal was based on the premise of an open frontier with Ireland -- a principle that Johnson's plan said Britain "is absolutely committed to upholding". In place of customs checks at the border, which would have entered into force once a Brexit transition period expires in 2021, the proposal says that "goods movements between Northern Ireland and Ireland will be notified using a declaration". Physical checks would be conducted at traders' premises or specific, designation locations but not at EU member Ireland's border with British Northern Ireland. Ireland has strongly opposed the reintroduction of border customs checks, calling them a dangerous approach.

PAKISTAN'S CLAIM OVER NIZAM'S FUNDS

UK court rules in  
favour of India

PTI, London

A UK High Court judge yesterday ruled in favour of India in a decades-old legal dispute with Pakistan over funds belonging to the Nizam of Hyderabad at the time of Partition in 1947 and deposited in a London bank account. The Nizam's descendants, Prince Mukarram Jah -- the titular eighth Nizam of Hyderabad -- and his younger brother Muffakham Jah, had joined hands with the Indian government in the legal battle against the Pakistan government over around 35 million pounds lying with NatWest Bank plc here. In his judgment handed down at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, Justice Marcus Smith ruled that the "Nizam VII was beneficially entitled to the Fund and those claiming in right of Nizam VII -- the Princes and India -- are entitled to have the sum paid out to their order". "Pakistan's contentions of non-justiciability by reason of the foreign act of state doctrine and non-enforceability on grounds of illegality both fail," the verdict notes. The dispute revolves around 1,007,940 pounds and nine shillings transferred in 1948 from the then Nizam of Hyderabad to the high commissioner in Britain of the newly-formed state of Pakistan. That amount has since grown into 35 million pounds as the Nizam's descendants, supported by India, claimed it belongs to them and Pakistan counter-claimed that it is rightfully theirs.



People gather to support an 18-year-old student who was shot in the chest by a policeman the day before during clashes between protesters and police in the Tsuen Wan area of Hong Kong, yesterday. Flash-mob rallies broke out in Hong Kong yesterday as anger mounted over the police shooting.

PHOTO: AFP

N Korea fires submarine-launched ballistic missile

North Korea fired what appeared to be a submarine-launched ballistic missile, Seoul said yesterday, just days before Washington and Pyongyang were set to resume long-stalled nuclear talks. Pyongyang frequently couples diplomatic overtures with military moves, as a way of maintaining pressure on negotiating partners, analysts say, and may believe this weapons system gives it added leverage. A proven submarine-based missile capability would take the North's arsenal to a new level, allowing deployment far beyond the Korean peninsula and a second-strike capability in the event of an attack on its military bases. The missile was "believed to be one of the Pukukksong models", the JCS said in a statement, referring to a line of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) under development by the North.

Concerns grow as Singapore's 'fake news' law takes effect

Singapore's new law to combat "fake news" came into effect yesterday despite criticism from tech giants and activists, who labelled the tough rules a "chilling" attempt to stifle dissent. The law gives government ministers powers to order social media sites to put warnings next to posts authorities deem to be false, and in extreme cases get them taken down. Facebook, Twitter and were given temporary exemptions from a handful of provisions in the act to give them time to adapt. If an action is judged to be malicious and damaging to Singapore's interests, companies could be hit with fines of up to Sg\$1 million (\$720,000), while individuals could face jail terms of up to 10 years.

Sanders pauses campaign over blocked artery



Senator Bernie Sanders suspended campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination yesterday after being treated for a blocked artery, his campaign said. "During a campaign event yesterday evening, Sen Sanders experienced some chest discomfort. Following medical evaluation and testing he was found to have a blockage in one artery and two stents were successfully inserted," Sanders senior advisor Jeff Weaver said in a statement. "Sen. Sanders is conversing and in good spirits. He will be resting up over the next few days," he said. The campaign said they were canceling Sanders's events and appearances "until further notice." Sanders, 78 has served in Congress as an independent aligned with Democrats since 1991, first as a representative of Vermont and then, since 2007, as a senator.

SOURCE: AFP

India open-defecation free

Says Modi, pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary

AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday declared the country free of open defecation, a feat he said was a major milestone for a country of 1.3 billion people, despite scepticism about his bold claim. "Today rural India, its villages have declared themselves open-defecation free. They have used self-inspiration, self-will and co-operation to achieve this through the Swachh Bharat Mission," he said at the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat in the evening. The announcement coincided with the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, an icon not just for Indian independence but also sanitation. The Prime Minister said that Indians have shed their hesitation for talking about sanitation and it has become an integral part of their "thought-process". "In 60 months, we have provided toilets to over 60 crore people by constructing over 11 crore toilets. The world is amazed at our success," PM Modi said. Whatever be the age, social and economic status, everyone has contributed in this mission of cleanliness with dignity



and respect, Modi said. He said the Swachh Bharat Mission had created over 75 lakh jobs, reported NDTV online. Earlier, Modi paid floral tributes, visited the museum there, interacted with students and also went to Gandhi's house called Hriday Kunj inside the Ashram. Modi also

penned his thoughts in the visitors' book. Modi made his "latrines for all" pledge when he first took office in 2014. The government claims to have built almost 100 million toilets in the past five years, winning Modi plaudits abroad -- including last week's award from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

REVIEWING PEACE TALKS PROGRESS

Taliban, US envoy visit Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Taliban co-founder Mullah Baradar was due in Pakistan yesterday as US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad also visited, officials said, though it was unclear if they would meet for the first time since Donald Trump scuttled talks between Washington and the insurgents. Insurgent spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that the Pakistan visit would be the fourth leg of a tour that included Russia, China and Iran. Taliban co-founder Mullah Baradar was due in Pakistan yesterday as US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad also visited, officials said, though it was unclear if they would meet for the first time since Donald Trump scuttled talks between Washington and the insurgents. Insurgent spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that the Pakistan visit would be the fourth leg of a tour that included Russia, China and Iran. The US embassy confirmed that Khalilzad was in Islamabad "this week" for consultations following discussions between the US and Pakistan at the United Nations General Assembly in New York last week. Baradar is head of the Taliban's political wing and usually based in Qatar, where for nearly a year the insurgents held face-to-face meetings with a US delegation led by Khalilzad.