

NEWS IN brief

Portugal's Socialists win re-election

AFP, Lisbon
Portugal's incumbent Prime Minister Antonio Costa's Socialists won a general election marked by low turnout on Sunday after presiding over a period of solid economic growth following years of austerity. The Socialist Party (PS) took 36.65 percent of the vote, followed by the centre-right Social Democrats (PSD) with 27.9 percent, according to near total results from the interior ministry. The party was yesterday weighing alliances with other parties that would allow it to head a stable minority government.

Amazon feathers same as Vatican hats: Pope

AFP, Vatican City
Pope Francis yesterday hit out at "offensive words" spoken against the Amazon's indigenous people, noting that a feather headdress is no more ridiculous than hats worn at the Vatican. "I was pained to hear, right here, a sarcastic comment about a pious man with feathers on his head who brought an offering," the pope said at the opening of a synod focused on the Amazon's poverty-stricken and isolated indigenous communities.

13 dead as migrant boat sinks off Italy

REUTERS, Lampedusa
Italian coastguards recovered the bodies of 13 women who died after a crowded migrant boat capsized in heavy weather as rescue boats approached it off the coast of Lampedusa, an island south of Sicily, local authorities said yesterday. The coastguard said rescue vessels had picked up 22 survivors, but they feared many other people might have died in the accident - the latest in a long line of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe.



Demonstrators calling themselves 'Aged Agitators' wear the climate change activist group Extinction Rebellion's logo on their heads as they demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament in central London yesterday. Extinction Rebellion has scheduled non-violent protests chiefly in Europe, North America and Australia over the next fortnight. Inset, an activist is arrested by the police during a blockade organised by the activists in Amsterdam.

PHOTO: AFP



Brexit ball is in your court now
Britain's Johnson tells EU

REUTERS, London
Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday told the European Union that the Brexit ball was in its court and that the bloc should now urgently discuss in detail his proposal for breaking the deadlock ahead of Britain's scheduled departure on October 31. With just 24 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU, both sides are positioning themselves to avoid blame for a delay or a disorderly no-deal Brexit. EU leaders reacted coolly to Johnson's last-ditch proposals to bridge the impasse, indicating just how far apart the two sides are over the first departure of a sovereign state from the EU, which was forged from Europe's ruins after World War Two. "What we're saying to our friends is (that) this is a very generous, fair and reasonable offer we've made. What we'd like to hear from you now is what your thoughts are," Johnson told reporters. "If you have issues with any of the proposals that we've come up with, then let's get into the detail and discuss them," he said, reiterating his position that the United Kingdom would leave the EU on October 31. European officials warned yesterday that Britain's latest Brexit deal proposal doesn't go far enough to allow a breakthrough before next week's Brussels summit. Johnson has insisted he will not ask for another delay to Britain's planned October 31 departure from the European Union. But he may be forced to do so by a British law passed to prevent a chaotic no-deal divorce, with European negotiators warning time is running out for talks.

HK faces more protests

Two arrestees charged for defying mask ban; cabinet member floats internet censorship to contain unrest

AGENCIES

Hong Kong police fired tear gas as a few hundred protesters gather outside Prince Edward metro station in the Mongkok district, a focal point for demonstrations, a Reuters witness said yesterday. Hundreds of protesters gathered in Hong Kong shopping malls during the day demanding "freedom", but expected street protests failed to materialise in any significant size as the scarred city struggled to recover from violent clashes in recent days. Earlier in the day, protesters formed large circles inside multi-level shopping malls and chanted "disband Hong Kong police force", "fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong" and "I have the right to wear a mask", as shoppers on a public holiday looked on. A journalist working with Hong Kong's public broadcaster was recovering in the hospital yesterday after being hit by a petrol bomb on Sunday night. Hong Kong's metro rail system, which typically carries about 5 million passengers a day, was only partially operating due to what authorities said was "serious vandalism" on Sunday night. Some stations were torched in the protests.



Many shops and Chinese banks were also extensively damaged. Hong Kong's government may curb access to the internet in a bid to contain months of increasingly violent democracy protests, a cabinet member told AFP yesterday, after an emergency-law ban on demonstrators wearing face masks failed to quell the unrest. A 38-year-old woman and an 18-year-old man were charged yesterday for violating the emergency laws. They were also charged with unlawful assembly. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the ban was needed to contain the unrest, which began nearly four months ago and has seen millions of people take to the streets demanding China stop strangling their freedoms. Ip Kwok-him, a veteran pro-Beijing politician and member of Hong Kong's executive council, fuelled those concerns when he said controls on the internet could be introduced. "The government will not rule out the possibility of placing a ban on the internet," he told AFP. Ip said the internet has been crucial to protesters, who have no public leaders and use online forums and encrypted messaging apps to mobilise.

Trump must produce tax returns: US federal judge

Rules presidents not immune from criminal probes

AFP, New York

A US federal judge in New York yesterday dismissed President Donald Trump's efforts to block access to years of his personal and corporate tax returns, saying sitting presidents are not immune from criminal investigations. In a 75-page ruling, Judge Victor Marrero rejected Trump's argument, saying such vast immunity would "operate to frustrate the administration of justice" by putting the president's personal and professional affairs off-limits. "This court cannot endorse such a categorical and limitless assertion of presidential immunity from judicial process," Marrero wrote. "The Court cannot square a vision of presidential immunity that would place the President above the law." Trump had filed suit against Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr, who had subpoenaed the accounting firm Mazars USA, seeking access to the president's tax returns dating back to 2011. Vance is investigating payments made by

Michael Cohen, Trump's former personal attorney, to Stormy Daniels, an adult film actress who claimed to have had an affair with Trump before he ran for president. Trump is expected to appeal the judge's ruling. Trump has declined to release his tax returns and there have been various attempts to obtain them, including by the Democratic-led House of Representatives. Meanwhile, Trump lashed out at Democrat Joe Biden on Sunday, strongly suggesting on Twitter that he and his family were corrupt and saying the former vice president should "hang it up." In a series of Twitter posts, the president advanced widely discredited allegations that Biden interfered improperly to protect his son Hunter from suggestions of corrupt dealings in Ukraine, and that the younger Biden also made \$1.5 billion in a questionable deal in China. "Based on all of the money he & his family probably 'extorted,' Joe should hang it up," Trump said.



Excessive force used in protests: Iraq's military

Iran accuses 'enemies' of trying to sow discord

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's military yesterday admitted for the first time it had used "excessive force" in nearly a week of deadly protests, as paramilitary units said they were ready to back the government. More than 100 people have been killed and several thousand wounded in demonstrations increasingly spiralling into violence, with witnesses reporting security forces using water cannons, tear gas and live rounds. On Sunday evening a mass protest in Sadr City in east Baghdad led to clashes that medics and security forces said left 13 people dead. In videos distributed on social media, protesters could be seen ducking into streets littered with burning tyres as a volley of gunfire and suspected heavy weapons were heard. "Excessive force outside the rules of engagement was used and we have begun

to hold accountable those commanding officers who carried out these wrong acts," the military said. It said Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi had ordered those forces to be replaced with federal police units and the intelligence services to open an investigation into the incident. It was the first time since protests broke out that security forces acknowledged using disproportionate measures, after the premier insisted they had been acting "within international standards" in dealing with demonstrations. Meanwhile, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday accused "enemies" of trying to drive a wedge between Tehran and Baghdad. "Enemies seek to sow discord but they've failed & their conspiracy won't be effective," Khamenei was quoted as saying on his office's Twitter account.



Men carry an injured person to a hospital after a blast in Jalalabad, Afghanistan yesterday. At least 10 people were killed and 27 wounded when a bomb hit a bus carrying army recruits in Jalalabad.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Taliban release three Indian engineers: report

The Afghan Taliban said it has freed three Indian engineers held hostage for over a year in an exchange for securing the release of 11 of its members, including some high-ranking officials of the militant group, according to a media report yesterday. The prisoner swap happened on Sunday, The Express Tribune quoted two Taliban officials as saying, but it did not disclose the location. The Taliban officials spoke on condition of anonymity, citing what they described as the sensitive nature of the issue. The officials refused to say who the militant group exchanged the prisoners with and whether the freed Taliban members were being held by Afghan authorities or US forces in Afghanistan.

Malaysia seeking \$100m in fines in 1MDB probe

Malaysian authorities have imposed fines of around \$100 million on 80 entities, intensifying their pursuit of people allegedly linked to the massive 1MDB corruption scandal, the anti-graft chief said yesterday. The fines are linked to a wide-ranging probe into billions of dollars that were looted from state investment fund 1MDB between 2009 and 2014, and spent on everything from yachts to expensive artwork, in a fraud allegedly involving the former prime minister. Claims that Najib Razak and his cronies pilfered massive sums from 1MDB contributed to the defeat of his long-ruling coalition in the election last year.

Nepal's former House speaker arrested over rape allegations



Police have arrested the former speaker of Nepal's parliament after a female employee in the assembly accused him of rape. A police van arrived at Krishna Bahadur Mahara's residence late Sunday and took him into custody after the district court ordered his arrest. "He was taken into custody yesterday to investigate the case," Shyam Lal Gyawali, Kathmandu police spokesman told AFP. Mahara, a senior member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party and former Maoist rebel, denied the allegation but stepped down as speaker last week after the woman gave details of the assault to media.

SOURCE: PTI, AFP

LANKA PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

Rajapakse clan steps up new bid for power

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's election commission yesterday agreed to let the brother of former strongman Mahinda Rajapakse stand in the country's presidential election, despite a string of corruption cases against him. Gotabhaya Rajapakse is frontrunner in the campaign for the November 16 election, even though his bid is widely seen as a front to get Mahinda, who was the country's leader from 2005 to 2015, back into power. The eldest of the Rajapakse brothers, Chamal, was a backup candidate in case Gotabhaya was disqualified over his dual Sri Lanka-US nationality. Gotabhaya is facing several cases over corruption allegations and the validity of his Sri Lankan citizenship. He claims he renounced his US citizenship in April. Rajapakse's main challenger is housing minister Sajith Premadasa, 52. Mahinda Rajapakse is barred from contesting the election because of a two-term limit. His time in power was marked by the end of Sri Lanka's bloody civil war against ethnic Tamil rebels, and international concerns about alleged human rights violations by Sri Lankan troops. Mahinda Rajapakse tried to become prime minister after a parliamentary election in August 2015 and ended up as the leader of the opposition.

India's J&K move alarms Naga rebels in northeast

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Thuingaleng Muivah, leader of India's oldest rebel organisation, has told Al Jazeera that he felt the Indian government's abrupt decision to strip Kashmir's special status was "unacceptable." The 85-year-old leads the National Socialist Council of Nagalim - Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) - northeast India's largest rebel outfit with an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 members fighting for independence for more than four decades. NSCN-IM, formed in 1980, along with other armed groups based in Nagaland - a Christian-majority state - wants all Naga people unified in a new sovereign state called Nagalim. But the August 5 decision by the Indian government to scrap Article 370 of the constitution that granted Indian-administered Kashmir's autonomy has triggered anxieties across the northeast region.

Nagaland is safeguarded by Article 371A, which exempts it from following Indian laws. Seven northeast states, including parts of Assam state, are protected under various clauses of Article 371. "India's Kashmir decision [was taken] without respecting the history of the Kashmiris. [It] is not acceptable to us," he said. Expressing disappointment with the way the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi diluted Kashmir's special status, Muivah said he feels "nothing short of betrayal" since India removed Kashmir's special status and brought its only Muslim-majority region under direct central rule. Although India's hardline Home Minister Amit Shah has reassured regional leaders in the northeast that Article 371 will not be scrapped, rebel groups fear that the current Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government may dilute these constitutional provisions as part of its "one nation one constitution" vision.

India SC halts tree felling for Mumbai metro

AFP, Mumbai

A mass felling of trees in one of the world's most-polluted megacities was halted by India's top court yesterday, amid protests their removal would strip the city of a precious "green lung." Some 2,700 trees were being cut down in the financial capital Mumbai to make way for a depot for subway carriages in the city of nearly 20 million people. But the felling angered locals, with Bollywood stars and residents joining regular demonstrations that grew over the weekend after workers started removing the trees at night. More than two dozen activists were arrested during weekend protests were all later released on bail, police said. Following an emergency hearing called after petitions from activists, the Supreme Court said no more trees in the suburb of Aarey were to be felled until a next court session on October 21. The date is also when crucial state elections are to be held, with the dispute taking on political significance.