

UIGHUR 'REPRESSION'

US curbs China officials' visas

Beijing yesterday decried a US decision to restrict visas for Chinese officials linked to the repression of Xinjiang Muslims, and called on Washington to withdraw the measure.

The United States has stepped up its criticism of China's treatment of Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in the western region, where rights group say more than one million are held in internment camps.

Washington earlier this week announced the blacklisting of 28 Chinese entities involved in rights violations in Xinjiang, which China has said was based on "groundless" claims.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the visa curbs on Tuesday, urging China to cease its "campaign of repression" in the region and release those interned.

China had until recently denied the camps existed, but later described them as "vocational education centres" where people learn Mandarin and job skills as necessary counter-terrorism measures.

The US is "disregarding the facts, slandering and smearing China on Xinjiang-related issues," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular press conference yesterday.

In 2017, Xinjiang authorities passed sweeping "anti-extremism" regulations that banned a wide range of behaviours and customs -- formalising a regional crackdown on certain Muslim practices.

Growing "abnormal" facial hair was included in the government's list, as well as wearing robes that cover the whole body and face.

An AFP investigation in June found that at least 30 mosques and religious sites have been destroyed in Xinjiang since 2017.

The heightened US pressure on China's policies in Xinjiang comes at a tense time for the two countries, which have been locked in a trade war for more than a year.



A correctional services van transporting Hong Kong activist Edward Leung, jailed for taking part in the 2016 Mongkok riots, leaves the High Court following an appeal hearing for his period of sentence in Hong Kong, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Turkey launches Syria offensive

Kurds call up civilians to defend against aggression, warn of 'humanitarian catastrophe' after Trump pulls out US troops

AFP, Ras Al-Ain

Defying world pressure, Turkey yesterday launched an assault on Kurdish forces in northern Syria with air strikes and artillery fire reported along the border.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the start of the attack on Twitter, labelling it "Operation Peace Spring," just days after US troops pulled back from the area.

It triggered criticism from Western countries who have allied with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) against the Islamic State jihadist group (IS).

An AFP correspondent reported Turkish artillery fire in the Ras al-Ain border area and explosions as warplanes flew overhead. Kurdish forces said at least two civilians were killed. Ras al-Ain was one of the places from which US troops withdrew on Monday which prevented a long-planned Turkish offensive.

SDF fighter, who played a crucial

OPERATION AGAINST KURDISH FORCES

- Russia warns US policies in Syria could 'ignite' whole region
- Damascus vows to respond to Turkish assault
- EU urges Ankara to halt offensive, says won't pay for 'safe zone'



role in defeating the so called Islamic state, armed with rocket launchers were seen deploying in the area, as Kurdish authorities called up civilians to defend against the assault.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said air strikes and artillery fire also hit the Tal Abyad border region further west.

The SDF called on the international community to impose a no-fly zone to protect against "an imminent

humanitarian crisis".

Erdogan said the operation would target both Kurdish militants and IS. Ankara says it is necessary to curb the power of the SDF due to its ties with Kurdish insurgents inside Turkey.

It also wants a "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the border where it could send back some of the 3.6 million refugees it hosts from the eight-year civil war.

President Donald Trump insisted the United States had not abandoned

its Kurdish allies. Trump was widely seen as giving a green light at the weekend, ordering the pullback of US troops from the Turkey-Syrian border which had served as a buffer.

Russian President Vladimir Putin urged Erdogan to "think carefully" before the offensive, while the European Union demanded Turkey halt its military operation.

Kurdish authorities announced a general mobilisation, urging all civilians to "head to the border with Turkey... to resist during this delicate historical moment".

Kurdish leaders said they would hold their erstwhile US ally and the whole international community responsible for any "humanitarian catastrophe".

The Kurds, a traditional US ally, also called on Moscow yesterday to facilitate dialogue with Damascus. Damascus yesterday vowed to respond to a planned Turkish invasion of northeastern Syria, saying it condemned Ankara's "hostile intentions."

Financial crisis shuts 80-year-old Malaysian newspaper

An eighty-year-old Malaysian newspaper, which had close links to the corruption-plagued former ruling party, halted publication yesterday after years of financial struggle, with 862 staff affected. Utusan Malaysia was the country's oldest Malay-language newspaper, founded in 1939 during British colonial rule by Yusof Ishak, who went on to become the first president of neighbouring Singapore. "Staff salaries could not be paid on time, debts could not be settled," executive chairman Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir said, adding the circulation of the paper had declined and advertising revenue dried up. The closure reflects the problems faced worldwide by traditional print media as readers stop buying papers and shift to consuming news online.

After decades, Iran women to attend football match freely

Thousands of Iranian women fans are to attend a football match freely today for the first time in decades, after FIFA threatened to suspend the country over its controversial male-only policy. The directive came after a fan dubbed "Blue Girl" died after setting herself on fire in fear of being jailed for dressing up as a boy to attend a match. Women were quick to get their hands on tickets to attend Iran's 2022 World Cup qualifier against Cambodia at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday. The first batch sold out in less than an hour, and additional seats were also snapped up in short order, state media said. 3,500 women are expected to attend the match in the ultra-conservative country.

Hillary hits back after Trump's election taunt



President Donald Trump sometimes seems to have not got over his defeat of Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016. He wants to do it again. "I think that Crooked Hillary Clinton should enter the race to try to steal it away from Uber Left Elizabeth Warren," he tweeted Tuesday, referencing both his habitual insult for Clinton and a new nickname for rising Democratic 2020 candidate Warren. Clinton is not anywhere near the current field vying to take on Trump in next year's election. But she played along Tuesday, firing back on Twitter: "Don't tempt me. Do your job." Meanwhile, Warren has squeezed ahead of long-time front-runner Joe Biden for the first time, according to compiled polls released Tuesday. The RealClearPolitics poll average put Warren on 26.6 percent and Biden on 26.4 percent in the Democratic primary contest. Warren, 70, a progressive senator from Massachusetts, has campaigned strongly throughout the summer, while centrist former vice president Joe Biden, 76, has been hit by health concerns and gaffes, including his son's involvement in a Ukraine company which eventually sparked an impeachment probe against Trump.

SOURCE: AFP

UK court delays key Brexit ruling until after EU summit

Britain, EU agree to hold last-ditch Brexit talks today

AGENCIES

Scottish judges will not rule on a bid to compel UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to obey a law designed to block a "no-deal" Brexit until after a key European Union summit.

They have delayed their ruling until October 22, days after the parliament's deadline to reach a Brexit divorce deal, and days before the United Kingdom is due to crash out of the EU by automatic operation of law on October 31.

Under legislation known as the Benn Act, passed with the assistance of a "rebel alliance" of Conservative MPs - who were subsequently sacked from the governing party - the prime minister is obliged to request a delay if no withdrawal deal is agreed between the UK and the EU by October 19.

The European Council of the heads of EU nations is set to meet on October 17 and 18.

In the court in Edinburgh on Tuesday, the government argued it had already undertaken to follow the law. Furthermore, its lawyers said, the deadline for a deal had not yet been reached, and so it would be inappropriate for the court to pass judgment at this time.

Meanwhile, Britain and the European Union yesterday agreed to hold last-ditch talks aimed at securing a Brexit deal with just days left to thrash out an agreement, as each side trades accusations of a failure to compromise.

Britain Secretary Steve Barclay will meet his EU counterpart Michel Barnier in Brussels today in an attempt to break the impasse before the October 17-18 summit.

After tempers frayed on both sides of the Channel on Tuesday, Barnier promised the bloc "will remain calm, respectful and constructive".

"I think a deal is possible and very difficult but possible," he told Sky News television.



Anti-Brexit activists protest near the European Parliament in Brussels, yesterday. Britain's Brexit Secretary Steve Barclay will meet EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier in Brussels today, as talks on the country's exit from the bloc reach a critical stage, Downing Street said.

Odds favour Thunberg for Peace Prize

Experts sceptical

AFP, Oslo

Bookmakers seem confident that Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg is a shoo-in for the Nobel Peace Prize to be announced this week, but some experts are more cautious.

The 16-year-old has already received Amnesty International's top honour and the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes dubbed the "alternative Nobel", and online betting sites like Ladbrokes now put her as favourite to win what is perhaps the world's most prestigious prize.

Thunberg made global headlines in late September when she lambasted world leaders at the UN climate summit in New York.

But is her impassioned wake-up call enough to earn her the Nobel Peace Prize? "Extremely unlikely," Henrik Urdal, director of the Peace Research Institute



in Oslo (Prio), told AFP, citing two reasons for his scepticism.

White House rules out cooperation

unlawful attempt to hide the facts.

A defiant White House declared war Tuesday against the impeachment investigation of Donald Trump, blasting the process as partisan, illegitimate and unconstitutional and saying neither the president nor his administration will cooperate.

In a fiery letter, the White House threw down the gauntlet to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the chairmen of three congressional panels leading the inquiry, challenging them to proceed with their effort to oust Trump despite zero future cooperation.

"Put simply, you seek to overturn the results of the 2016 election and deprive the American people of the president they have freely chosen," White House counsel Pat Cipollone wrote in an eight-page letter.

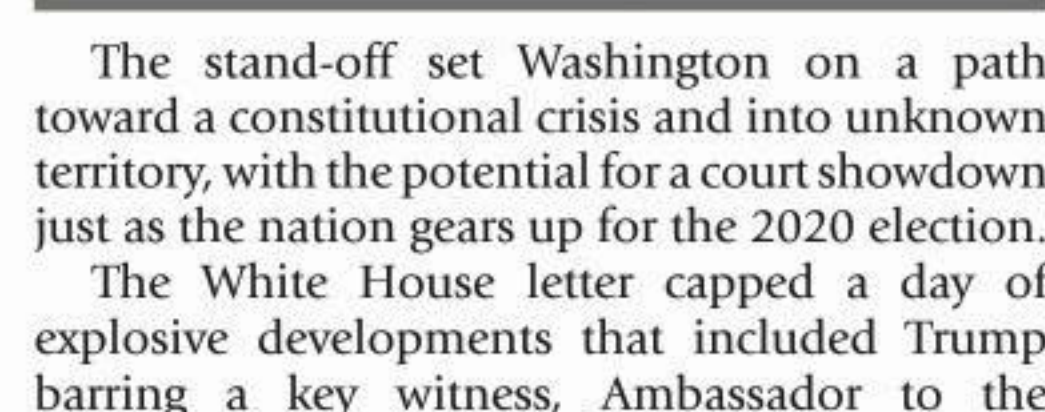
"Your inquiry lacks any legitimate constitutional foundation, any pretense of fairness, or even the most elementary due process protections," he said of the probe, which is weighing whether Trump abused his office by seeking a corruption probe in Ukraine of his rival Joe Biden.

"President Trump cannot permit his administration to participate in this partisan inquiry under these circumstances."

"Mr President, you are not above the law. You will be held accountable," she said, warning that "continued efforts to hide the truth of the president's abuse of power from the American people will be regarded as further evidence of obstruction."

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT PROBE

Republican-led probe finds Russia helped Trump in 2016



The stand-off set Washington on a path toward a constitutional crisis and into unknown territory, with the potential for a court showdown just as the nation gears up for the 2020 election.

The White House letter capped a day of explosive developments that included Trump barring a key witness, Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, from speaking to Congress -- calling it a "totally compromised kangaroo court."

In response, Democrats slapped Sondland with a subpoena that "compels" him to appear on October 16.

Meanwhile, a Senate Republican-led investigation said in a report Tuesday that Russia indeed sought to help Trump in the 2016 election, contradicting persistent White House claims to the contrary.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's 2016 election investigation report said a sweeping social media manipulation campaign by the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) represented "overt support of Russia's favored candidate in the US presidential election."

"The committee found that the IRA sought to influence the 2016 US presidential election by harming Hillary Clinton's chances of success and supporting Donald Trump at the direction of the Kremlin," it said.

"IRA social media activity was overtly and almost invariably supportive of then-candidate Trump," it said.

SHOOTING TARGETING SYNAGOGUE

At least 2 killed in Germany

AFP, Halle

At least two people were shot dead on a street in the German city of Halle yesterday, police said, with witnesses saying that a synagogue was among the gunmen's targets as Jews marked the holy day of Yom Kippur.

One suspect was captured but with a manhunt ongoing for other perpetrators, security has been tightened in synagogues in other eastern German cities while Halle itself was in lockdown. Reports said the attackers tried to enter the synagogue. Two people also suffered serious bullet wounds in the attack and were being operated on.

Anti-terrorist prosecutors confirmed that they were taking over the probe. Bild daily reported that the shooting took place in front of the synagogue, and a hand grenade was also flung into a Jewish cemetery.

Wednesday's shootings came three months after the shocking murder of local pro-migrant politician Walter Lübcke in the western city of Kassel, allegedly by a known neo-Nazi. Lübcke's killing has deeply shaken Germany, raising questions about whether it has failed to take seriously a rising threat from right-wing extremists.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer last month warned of the rising danger of the militant far right, calling it "as big a threat as radical Islamism".

