

NEWS IN
brief**Ebola virus contained in DR Congo: WHO**

AFP, Geneva

Efforts to halt an Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo have made "significant progress", with the virus now contained to a far smaller and mainly rural area, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday. "We have put the virus in the corner," Michael Ryan, the executive director of WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, told reporters in Geneva. "I believe we have really squeezed the virus into a much smaller geographical area," he said.

EU removes Swiss, UAE from tax-haven list

AFP, Luxembourg

The EU removed Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates from its list of tax havens yesterday, giving two global hubs for multinational tax schemes the all clear. "Albania, Costa Rica, Mauritius, Serbia and Switzerland have implemented ahead of their deadline all necessary reforms to comply with EU tax good governance principles," the bloc's 28 finance ministers said. Switzerland had approved a tax reform in October 2018, but its entry into force had been delayed due to a referendum.

Romania gov't collapses in no-confidence vote

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's beleaguered left-wing government collapsed in a no-confidence vote yesterday, paving the way for the president to appoint a new prime minister. The collapse comes just weeks before a presidential election and amid controversy over the country's nominee for EU commissioner. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila lost her parliamentary majority in August when the junior coalition partner of her Social Democrats (PSD), withdrew support, citing major disagreements.



Israeli troops use tear gas against Palestinian protesters during a clash near the village of Caisan southeast of the West Bank city of Bethlehem, where Israeli bulldozers yesterday demolished houses that were reportedly built without a license.

PHOTO: AFP

ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS FORMULA

Taiwan rejects China's offer*President Tsai says the arrangement set HK 'on the edge of disorder'*

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan's president yesterday rejected a "one country, two systems" formula that Beijing has suggested could be used to unify the island and the mainland, saying such an arrangement had set Hong Kong "on the edge of disorder". President Tsai Ing-wen also vowed in a National Day speech to defend Taiwan's sovereignty, saying her government would safeguard freedom and democracy as Beijing ramps up pressure on the self-ruled island it considers a wayward province. Tsai, who is seeking re-election in January amid criticism of her policy towards China, referred to the arrangement for the return of the former British colony of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997 as a failure.

Hong Kong has been hit by months of anti-government protests triggered by widespread resentment of what many city residents see as relentless efforts by Beijing to exert control of their city despite the promises of autonomy.

China has proposed that Taiwan be brought under Chinese rule under a similar arrangement, but Tsai said Beijing's policies towards the island were a danger to

regional stability.

"China is still threatening to impose its 'one country, two systems' model for Taiwan. Their diplomatic offensives and military coercion pose a serious challenge to regional stability and peace," Tsai said.

"When freedom and democracy are challenged, and when the Republic of China's existence and development are threatened, we must stand up and defend ourselves,"

Tsai said, referring to Taiwan by its official name.

"The overwhelming consensus among Taiwan's 23 million people is our rejection of 'one country, two systems,' regardless of party affiliation or political position."

The island has long been a flashpoint in the US-China relationship.

Taiwan's National Day, marking the anniversary of the start of a 1911 uprising that led to the end of dynastic rule in China and the founding of a republic, was celebrated in Taipei with singing, dancing and parades.

Cold War hostility between the island and the mainland had eased over the past decade or so as both sides focused more on expanding business ties, but relations have cooled considerably since Tsai took office in 2016.

Tsai vows to defend its sovereignty amid China pressure

The island has long been a flashpoint in US-China relationship

**China's treatment of Uighurs 'enormous rights violation'***Says Pompeo; Beijing denies abuse allegation*

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday that China's treatment of Muslims, including the Uighurs, in western China was an "enormous human rights violation" and Washington will continue to raise the issue.

"This is not only an enormous human rights violation, but we don't think it's in the best interests of the world or of China to engage in this kind of behavior," Pompeo said in a television interview with American broadcaster PBS.

Asked whether Chinese President Xi Jinping was responsible, Pompeo said: "Xi Jinping leads the country just like the leader of a tank platoon, a small business or a country is responsible for the things that happen in your name."

Punishing Beijing for its treatment of Muslim minorities, the US government this week widened its trade blacklist to include some of China's top artificial intelligence startups and announced visa

restrictions on Chinese government and Communist Party officials it believes responsible for the detention or abuse of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang province.

Pompeo on Sunday called on all countries to resist China's demands to repatriate ethnic Uighurs, saying Beijing's campaign in the western Chinese region of Xinjiang was an "attempt to erase its own citizens."

UN experts and activists say at least 1 million Uighurs, and members of other largely Muslim minority groups, have been detained in camps in the remote region.

China has denied any mistreatment of Uighurs, and said Xinjiang was its internal affair.

"Recently, the US side has been attacking and smearing China's Xinjiang policies on the pretense of religion and human rights, and making baseless and mistaken remarks that are contrary to the facts," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters during a daily briefing in Beijing.

**Iraq PM vows full probe into killings, reshuffle***Calm returns as 3-day nat'l mourning begins*

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi on Wednesday promised a full probe into last week's violence that left more than 100 dead in anti-government protests, as calm returned after three days of national mourning begins.

In a televised address to the nation, Abdel Mahdi pledged a package of reforms and said his government would carry out a "thorough investigation" as well as pay compensation to the "martyrs", both civilians and members of the security forces killed in clashes.

He also said he would propose a government reshuffle to parliament.

With the return of normal life in Baghdad, traffic has again clogged the main roads of the sprawling city of nine million inhabitants.

The government announced three days of national mourning in the wake of the unrest.

On Tuesday, security restrictions were lifted around Baghdad's Green Zone, where

government offices and embassies are based.

Iraq descended into violence last week as protests that began with demands for an end to rampant corruption and chronic unemployment escalated with calls for a complete overhaul of the political system.

The demonstrations were unprecedented because of their apparent spontaneity and independence in a deeply politicised society.

Protesters were met with tear gas and live fire. On Sunday night, scenes of chaos engulfed Sadr City, the Baghdad stronghold of influential Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr, who called for the government to resign.

At least 13 demonstrators died in Sadr City, where the military recognised "excessive force outside the rules of engagement" had been used.

According to official figures, the week of violence in Baghdad and across southern Iraq killed more than 100 people, mostly protesters but including several police, with more than 6,000 others wounded.



Indonesia's Chief Security Minister Wiranto is pictured as he is being attacked during his visit in Pandeglang, Banten province, Indonesia yesterday. Two members of an IS-linked terror network stabbed Wiranto, country's intelligence head said. Wiranto was recovering in hospital after undergoing emergency surgery. PHOTO: REUTERS

DEFAMATION CASE

Rahul Gandhi pleads not guilty

PTI, Surat

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday appeared before a magisterial court and pleaded not guilty in a criminal defamation case filed against him for his "why do all thieves share the Modi surname" remarks.

Gandhi appeared before the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate B H Kapadia here and pleaded not guilty when asked by the court whether he accept the charges, levelled against him by BJP legislator from Surat-West, Purnesh Modi.

After Gandhi's plea was recorded, his lawyers moved an application seeking a permanent exemption from personal appearance in the next hearings. After Modi's lawyers raised objection to the exemption plea, the court said it will decide on the plea on December 10.

The court said Gandhi



is not required to remain present during the next hearing on that date.

In his complaint, the BJP legislator had alleged the Congress leader had defamed the entire Modi community with his remarks, made during the Lok Sabha campaign this year.

At a campaign rally at Kolar in Karnataka on April 13, Gandhi had said, "Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Narendra Modi... how come they all have Modi as common surname? How come all thieves have Modi as common surname?"

In his complaint, Purnesh Modi had said the Congress leader had defamed the entire Modi community with his statement.

LEAKING TOP SECRET INFO

US counter-terror analyst arrested

AFP, Washington

A counter-terrorism analyst at the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly leaking top secret information to journalists, officials said.

Henry Kyle Frese, 30, of Alexandria, Virginia, was taken into custody when he arrived at work and faces two counts of revealing classified defense information, they said.

"Frese was caught red-handed disclosing sensitive national security information for personal gain," assistant attorney general John Demers told reporters.

The Justice Department did not reveal the content of the information allegedly leaked by Frese other than to say that it concerned a "foreign country's weapons systems."

The identity of the two journalists to whom Frese allegedly provided classified information was also not disclosed.

The journalists involved appeared to work for CNBC and NBC News, according to information gleaned from the indictment and Frese's Twitter feed.

CNBC, citing "sources with direct knowledge of US intelligence reports," reported in May 2018 that China had installed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on the contested Spratly Islands.

There was no immediate response from CNBC to a request for comment.

PROTEST OVER UNFULFILLED PROMISES

Mexican mayor tied to truck, dragged through street

AFP, Las Margaritas

Angry farmers stormed a city hall in southern Mexico, seized the mayor and dragged him through town from the back of a pickup truck in protest, officials said Wednesday.

The incident occurred Tuesday when dozens of members of the Tojolabal indigenous community armed with clubs broke into the mayor's office in the town of Las Margaritas in the state of Chiapas.

Witnesses told investigators they tied up the mayor, Jorge Luis Escandon, pushed him outside and tied him to the back of a pickup.

They then dragged him several dozen meters (yards) down the street, before police and public employees intervened and freed Escandon, who survived without major injury.

The mayor accused his attackers of trying to extort him.

"Around 50 or 60 people came in three pickup trucks, armed with clubs and looking to kidnap city officials to extort us and get what they've always wanted: to be given money," he told AFP.

"They started struggling, carrying me, tied up one foot and dragged me out of my office to the street," he said.

State prosecutor Jorge Luis Llavén said the attackers were demanding more public resources, including direct cash transfers, for their rural community, Santa Rita El Invernadero.

Leftist President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has introduced a policy of providing public assistance in the form of cash payments to beneficiaries, in order to stem corruption by cutting out bureaucratic middlemen.

Eleven people were arrested and a dozen injured in the melee. Chiapas state police were also sent to help restore order in Las Margaritas, a town of 20,000 people near Mexico's border with Guatemala.

This is not the first time farmers from Santa Rita El Invernadero have staged a violent protest. Four months ago they vandalized the town hall, demanding that Escandon fulfill promises he had made during the 2018 campaign.

CRITICISM OF MISSILE TEST

North Korea slams European nations

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday slammed a statement by European UN Security Council members urging strict enforcement of sanctions against Pyongyang for its latest missile test, calling the move a "serious provocation".

Pyongyang fired a sea-launched missile on October 2 in the latest -- and most provocative -- of a series of weapons tests, just days before long-stalled US-North Korean nuclear talks were to resume in Sweden.

The North then walked away from the Stockholm talks on Saturday saying it was disappointed at the lack of "new and creative" solutions offered by Washington, although the US said it was willing to meet again in two weeks.

In their statement at the UN Tuesday, the Europeans -- France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Britain and Estonia -- condemned Pyongyang's tests and urged it to engage in "good faith in meaningful negotiations with the United States."

The North yesterday accused the Europeans of double standards.

"The UNSC which champions fairness and equity picks fault with the just measure belonging to our right to self-defence, while keeping mum about the test-fire of Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile recently conducted by the US. This is a serious provocation against the DPRK," a foreign ministry spokesperson said.