

NEWS IN
brief

Delhi pollution 'action plan' comes into force

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi banned the use of diesel generators yesterday as pollution levels in the Indian capital exceeded safe limits by more than four times. Every winter, New Delhi is enveloped in a noxious blanket of smog of car fumes, industrial emissions and smoke from stubble burning at farms outside the megacity of 20 million people. Other measures that will come into effect include banning trucks and road-rationing scheme, meaning cars with odd and even plates would be allowed on alternate days in that period.

14 police killed in attack in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

Gunmen killed 14 police Monday in an ambush in the state of Michoacan in western Mexico, authorities said. Local media reports said the state police were executing a warrant on the city outskirts when gunmen in armored four-by-four trucks opened fire. They torched at least two patrol cars in the ensuing chaos and left signs with threatening messages directed at the security forces at the scene.

85 killed during Afghan polls campaign: UN

AFP, Kabul

Hundreds of people were killed or wounded in violence related to Afghanistan's recent presidential election season as the Taliban sought to undermine the democratic process, a UN agency said yesterday. UNAMA reported that 85 people were killed and another 373 wounded in election violence during the period from June 8 to September 30. On polling day alone, 28 civilians were killed and 249 injured. Children accounted for more than one-third of the victims.

BREXIT IMPASSE

'Hours left' to secure deal

REUTERS, Luxembourg

The European Union gave Britain until the end of Tuesday to work out a Brexit deal that can be approved at a leaders' summit this week but said a delay to the Oct 31 scheduled departure date and a breakdown of talks were also still on the cards.

As the clock ticked, French President Emmanuel Macron spoke to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier updated the 27 remaining member states, and technical talks continued in a push to get an agreement.

The main sticking point remains the border between EU-member Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland.

Three years after Britons voted in a referendum to quit the EU, negotiators are still wrestling with the question of how to prevent the border becoming a backdoor into the bloc's single market without erecting controls which could undermine the 1998 peace agreement that ended decades of conflict.

"Even if an agreement has been difficult, more and more difficult, it's still possible this week," Barnier told reporters in Luxembourg, where he briefed EU ministers.

Barnier also said he saw three possible scenarios ahead - a deal on Tuesday, a Brexit delay, or a breakdown of talks.

However, Ireland's foreign minister made clear that the window of opportunity was closing, saying a deal must be done by the end of Tuesday to be put forward for approval at the summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday.

"It is of course possible to move beyond the summit and to continue talks next week," Simon Coveney also told reporters.



(From top, clockwise) Smoke billows from the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain on the first week of Turkey's military operation against Kurdish forces; A Syrian woman fleeing the battle zone of Ras al-Ain between Turkey-led forces and Kurdish fighters arrives at the city of Tal Tamr; and mourners, in the Syrian Kurdish town of Qamishli, attend the funeral of five Syrian Democratic Forces' fighters killed in battles of Ras al-Ain. PHOTO: AFP

No concessions

HK leader tells protesters in the face of violence, slams US senator for 'police state' remark

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Embattled Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam yesterday ruled out making any concessions to pro-democracy protesters in the face of escalating violence, which police said was now "life threatening" citing the detonation of a small bomb.

"I have said on many occasions that violence will not give us the solution. Violence would only breed more violence," Lam told a news conference.

"For concessions to be made simply because of escalating violence will only make the situation worse. On the other hand, we should consider every means to end the violence."

Protesters have five main demands, which include universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into what they say has been excessive force by police in dealing with the

demonstrations.

Hong Kong has been rocked by four months of unrest, with massive marches and at times violent protests involving tear gas, petrol bombs and live rounds, over concerns Beijing

is tightening its grip on the city and eroding democratic rights.

Police have arrested more than 2,300 people since June when the unrest escalated, according to Lam.

US Senator Josh Hawley, visiting

Hong Kong on Sunday, warned the city was in danger of sliding into a "police state". Lam rejected such criticism yesterday.

"The Hong Kong police force is a highly professional and civilised force," she said. "I would challenge every politician to ask themselves if the large extent of violence acts and all those petrol bombs and arson and really deadly attacks on policeman happened in their own country, what would they do?"

According to media, Hawley responded yesterday saying: "I chose the words 'police state' purposely - because that is exactly what Hong Kong is becoming. I saw it myself. If Carrie Lam wants to demonstrate otherwise, here's an idea: resign."

Hong Kong is facing its first recession in a decade, with tourism and retail hit hard by the unrest.

India blocks SMS services in J&K after trucker killed

Police arrest sister, daughter of ex-CM Abdullah

AFP, Srinagar

Text messaging services were blocked in Indian Kashmir just hours after being restored when a truck driver was killed by suspected militants and his vehicle set ablaze, authorities said yesterday.

Separately Indian officials said that a 24-year-old woman died in the latest exchange of artillery fire with Pakistan over their de-facto border dividing the blood-soaked Himalayan region.

Security sources said the decision to cut text messaging services was taken to reduce the ability of militants to communicate.

Indian authorities had only restored call and text services for mobile phones on Monday, following a 72-day blackout in the restive northern territory imposed after New Delhi scrapped the region's semi-autonomous status. The seven million-plus people of the Kashmir Valley are still cut off from the internet, however.

Authorities said SMS services were cut

More unrest feared in Spain over Catalan sentence

Catalonia geared up for more upheaval yesterday a day after thousands of pro-independence activists stormed Barcelona airport in an angry response to Spain's jailing of nine of its leaders following a failed secession bid. Monday's ruling unleashed a day of chaos, with Catalan separatists enraged by the Supreme Court's decision to hand heavy prison sentences of between nine and 13 years to leaders convicted of sedition over the 2017 referendum and short-lived declaration of independence. By early yesterday, several roads and railway lines remained cut as activists awaited new instructions from Democratic Isunam, the group which coordinated Monday's mass bid to swarm the city's El Prat airport, where they choked off road and rail access.

Mass raids target Russian opposition leaders

Russian investigators raided opposition offices across the country yesterday, in the latest move to increase pressure on top Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and his allies. The early morning raids targeted more than 100 offices and homes in 30 cities, the opposition said, including the headquarters of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) in Moscow. Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner, denounced the raids as an attempt to intimidate the opposition. The raids followed similar mass searches last month and came less than a week after Navalny's foundation was declared a "foreign agent".

Swiss glaciers shrink 10 percent in five years



Switzerland's glaciers have lost a tenth of their volume in the past five years alone - a melting rate unmatched during observations stretching back more than a century, a study showed yesterday. Measurements on 20 Swiss glaciers have shown that melt rates this year have reached "record levels", according to the annual study on the state of the glaciers, published by the Cryospheric Commission at the Swiss Academy of Sciences. During two weeks of intense heat at the end of June and again in late July, "the volume of snow and ice melting on Swiss glaciers ... was equivalent to the country's total annual consumption of drinking water," it said in a statement. Over the past 12 months, around two percent of Switzerland's total glacier volume has been lost, the commission said.

SOURCE: AFP

Japan typhoon death toll hits 66

REUTERS, Koriyama

The death toll in the worst typhoon to hit Japan for decades climbed to 66 yesterday as rescuers slogged through mud and debris in an increasingly grim search for the missing, and as thousands of homes remained without power or water.

Fifteen people remain missing nearly three days after Typhoon Hagibis smashed into central and eastern Japan, national broadcaster NHK said. More than 200 people were injured in the storm, whose name means "speed" in the Tagalog language.

The highest toll was in Fukushima prefecture north of Tokyo, where levees burst in at least 14 places along the Abukuma River, which meanders through a number of cities in the largely agricultural prefecture. At least 25 people died in Fukushima, including a mother and child who were caught in flood waters, NHK said. Another child of the woman remains missing.

About 133,000 households were without water while 22,000 lacked electricity, well down on the hundreds of thousands initially left without power but a cause for concern in northern areas where temperatures are falling.

Survivors described how water rose rapidly to chest height in about an hour and mainly at night, making it hard to escape to higher ground. Many of the dead in Fukushima were elderly, NHK said.



Britain's Prince William (C), Duke of Cambridge, and his wife Catherine (R), Duchess of Cambridge, meet with school children during their visit to a government-run school in Islamabad, yesterday. They also met Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. The couple were due to lunch with Khan before he heads to Saudi Arabia later yesterday, where he is expected to continue his mission to help defuse tensions in the Gulf by facilitating talks between Riyadh and Tehran. PHOTO: AFP

INSTANT-NOODLE HARMS ASIAN KIDS

AFP, Manila

A diet heavy on cheap, modern food like instant noodles that fills bellies but lacks key nutrients has left millions of children unhealthily thin or overweight in southeast Asia, experts say.

The Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia have booming economies and rising standards of living, yet many working parents do not have the time, money or awareness to steer clear of food hurting their kids. In those three nations, an average of 40 percent of children aged five and below are malnourished, higher than the global average of one-in-three, according to a report from Unicef published yesterday, the UN children's agency.

"Parents believe that filling their children's stomach is the most important thing. They don't really think about an adequate intake of protein, calcium or fibre," Hasbullah Thabrary, a public health expert in Indonesia, told AFP.

Unicef said the harm done to children is both a symptom of past deprivation and a predictor of future poverty, while iron deficiency impairs a child's ability to learn and raises a woman's risk of death during or shortly after childbirth.

To give some sense of scale to the problem, Indonesia had 24.4 million children under five last year, while the Philippines had 11 million and Malaysia 2.6 million, Unicef data show.

Mueni Mutunga, Unicef Asia nutrition specialist, traced the trend back to families ditching traditional diets for affordable, accessible and easy-to-prepare "modern" meals.

"Noodles are easy. Noodles are cheap. Noodles are quick and an easy substitute for what should have been a balanced diet," she told AFP.

The noodles, which cost as little as 23 US cents a packet in Manila, are low on essential nutrients and micronutrients like iron and are also protein-deficient while having high fat and salt content, Mutunga added.

Indonesia was the world's second-biggest consumer of instant noodles, behind China, with 12.5 billion servings in 2018, according to the World Instant Noodles Association.

The figure is more than the total consumed by India and Japan put together.

Low-income households in Malaysia depend largely on ready-made noodles, sweet potatoes and soya-based products as their major meals, Mutunga said.

Sugar-rich biscuits, beverages and fast food also pose problems in these countries, according to experts.

Rolling back the influence instant noodles have on the daily lives, and health, of people in southeast Asia will likely require government intervention, they said.

UNICEF REPORT

Third of kids obese or malnourished

AFP, Paris

A third of the world's nearly 700 million children under five years old are undernourished or overweight and face lifelong health problems as a consequence, according to a grim UN assessment of childhood nutrition released yesterday.

"If children eat poorly, they live poorly," said Unicef Executive Director Henrietta Fore, unveiling the Fund's first State of the World's Children report since 1999.

"We are losing ground in the fight for healthy diets."

Problems that once existed at opposite ends of the wealth spectrum have today converged in poor and middle-income countries, the report showed.

Despite a nearly 40 percent drop, 149 million children four or younger are today still too short for their age, a clinical condition that impairs both brain and body development. Another 50 million are afflicted by wasting, a chronic and debilitating thinness also born of poverty.

At the same time, half of youngsters across the globe under five are not getting essential vitamins and minerals, a long-standing problem Unicef has dubbed "hidden hunger." Over the last three decades, however, another form of child malnutrition has surged across the developing world: excess weight.

Across all age groups, more than 800 million people in the world are constantly hungry and another two billion are eating too much of the wrong foods, driving epidemics of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Let 'Napoleon' rescue Kurds

Suggests Trump, asks Syria's Assad to protect them, fight Turkey

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump suggested Monday that Syria's formerly US-allied Kurds could look to 19th century French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte for protection after the US president ordered the departure of nearly 1,000 US troops from the country.

Turkey was threatening to invade northeastern Syria after launching a military assault on the Kurds last week, leaving more than 300 dead on both sides and sending 160,000 refugees fleeing.

"Anyone who wants to assist Syria in protecting the Kurds is good with me, whether it is Russia, China, or Napoleon Bonaparte. I hope they all do great, we are 7,000 miles away!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

He defended his weekend order to vacate northeastern Syria and abandon the Kurds, saying that the US mission to defeat Islamic State in the region had been achieved "100 percent."

The president said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should defend the region.

"Let Syria and Assad protect the Kurds and fight Turkey for their own land. I said to my Generals, why should we be fighting for Syria and Assad to protect the land of our enemy?" Trump wrote.

Kurdish officials and residents have expressed outrage at what they call a US betrayal that shortchanges the sacrifices made in the fight against IS.

Since 2014, the SDF have been the coalition's main partner on the ground in Syria, spearheading key battles with allied air support on the way to eliminating the jihadists' self-proclaimed "caliphate" earlier this year.

