

NEWS IN
briefRouhani's brother
starts 5-yr jail term

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's brother entered prison yesterday to begin a five-year sentence after he was convicted of corruption, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported, citing his lawyer. Hossein Fereydoun was arrested in July 2017 and put on trial in February this year on allegations of financial violations. Fereydoun acted as a key adviser and gatekeeper to the president before his arrest.

Taliban truck bomb
attack kills 3; 20 hurt

AFP, Jalalabad

At least three people were killed and about 20 children wounded when a Taliban truck bomb detonated near a rural police station and partially destroyed a nearby religious school, Afghan officials said. The early morning attack happened in Alishing district in eastern Laghman province, said interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi.

2nd French academic
detained in Iran

AFP, Paris

A prominent French academic has been in detention in Iran since June, when he was arrested with his Franco-Iranian colleague, a researchers' group announced yesterday. Roland Marchal, a sociologist whose research focuses on civil wars in Africa, and Fariba Adelkhah, an anthropologist, both work at the Sciences Po university in Paris. Adelkhah's arrest was confirmed by Tehran on July 16. The reason for her detention has not yet been made public. French foreign ministry in a statement confirmed Marchal's detention and said it strongly condemned his arrest.



Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam (2nd L) leaves the chamber for a second time while trying to give her annual policy address as she is heckled by pro-democracy lawmakers (at background) at the Legislative Council in Hong Kong, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

HK leader abandons key speech amid heckles

US lawmakers back bill to support protesters

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's embattled leader abandoned a State of the Union-style speech yesterday after she was shouted down by opposition lawmakers on a day that also saw a prominent protest leader left bloodied by hammer-wielding thugs.

The speech by chief executive Carrie Lam was billed as an attempt to win hearts and minds after four months of seething pro-democracy protests.

Instead the day laid bare the intense polarisation coursing through the semi-autonomous financial hub after four months of huge and increasingly violent rallies.

Lam's speech was swiftly dismissed by protesters who called for a new rally on Sunday.

Hours later the leader of the group organising that march was rushed to hospital after an attack by suspected government loyalists.

The city's unelected pro-Beijing leader, who has historic low approval ratings, tried twice to begin her policy address inside the Legislative Council, three months after the

building was trashed by masked protesters.

But pro-democracy lawmakers -- a minority of the pro-Beijing stacked legislature -- heckled her and called for her resignation.

Lam instead released a pre-recorded video, announcing plans to increase housing and land supply in a city that has one of the least affordable property markets in the world, as well as various subsidies.

Meanwhile, US House of Representatives passed a bill Tuesday sought by pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong that aims to defend civil rights in the semi-autonomous territory, prompting an angry response from China.

The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which will now move to the Senate before it can become law, has drawn rare bipartisan support in a polarized Congress.

The law would end the Hong Kong-US special trading status unless the State Department certifies annually that city authorities are respecting human rights and the rule of law.

'Basic foundations' ready

Says Tusk as EU, UK scramble for Brexit deal on eve of key summit

AFP, Brussels

British and European negotiators ploughed on with Brexit talks yesterday hoping that at least an outline deal can be found in time for the European summit.

European leaders will head to Brussels today hoping to decide whether to give the go-ahead to officials to draw up a final withdrawal treaty.

But first, EU negotiator Michel Barnier and European diplomats want to know if Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson can sell the draft deal at home.

"The basic foundations of an agreement are ready and in theory tomorrow we could accept this deal with Great Britain and avoid the chaos and the misfortune linked to an uncontrolled, chaotic exit," Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, said on Poland's TVN24 news.

"Theoretically, in seven or eight hours everything should be clear," summit host Tusk added as negotiators prepared for a second gruelling late night shift at the Brussels conference

table.

In London, Johnson met his sceptical Northern Irish allies the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) for the third time in three days to try to shore up support for a compromise deal.

The DUP will find it hard to accept



a reported offer to allow Northern Ireland to stick to EU customs rules after Brexit, which the EU wants to see to avoid the return of a hard border on the island of Ireland.

Brexit minister Steve Barclay described the closed-door meetings in Brussels as "intensive" and confirmed Britain would ask for another Brexit extension if there is no deal by Saturday.

Briefing European commissioners, Barnier confirmed that "ongoing talks have been constructive but there still remains a number of significant issues to resolve."

Earlier, Barnier had said a draft of any deal would have to be ready by early Wednesday if it was to go before European leaders at their summit, which begins today.

European diplomatic sources said, the leaders expect to make one of three choices. They could either give the nod to the draft text that Barnier and UK negotiators are drawing up as the basis to a formal treaty or agree that the talks are promising and set a timetable for further work. Or, more pessimistically, they could conclude that the two sides are still so far apart that new ideas are needed if Britain is to avoid crashing out of the bloc without a deal on October 31.

Johnson has promised to take the UK out of the European Union on October 31, with or without a follow-on agreement to maintain orderly economic ties with its former partners.

'Brexit-free' TV channel!

A British broadcaster will launch a new "pop-up channel" dedicated to Brexit-free coverage, in a bid to attract viewers tired of hearing about the divisive issue. Sky News Brexit-Free, which was scheduled to go live at 1600 GMT (5:00 pm local time) yesterday, has been set up after surveys showed Britons are avoiding the news due to fatigue with the arguments over Britain's fractious withdrawal from the EU. It will air for five hours from the same time every workday. The broadcaster's main free-to-air news channel will continue to cover Brexit, with negotiations ongoing before the country's planned October 31 departure date from the European Union.

Overeating is 'personal destruction': Pope

The pope yesterday contrasted the world's 820 million hungry people with those who turn food into "an avenue of personal destruction" through overeating, in comments to mark World Food Day. Pope Francis noted that the "distorted relationship between food and nutrition" has left almost 700 million people overweight, "victims of improper dietary habits." "We are in fact witnessing how food is ceasing to be a means of subsistence and turning into an avenue of personal destruction," the pontiff said. He called for "the cultivation of lifestyles inspired by gratitude for the gifts we have received and the adoption of a spirit of temperance (and) moderation."

Kim's horseback ride spurs policy shift speculation



New pictures of Kim Jong Un riding a white horse through a winter landscape to the summit of Mount Paektu, a sacred peak for North Koreans, have fuelled speculation that the young leader may be set for a major policy announcement. Analysts said the hike may signal a new policy direction for the nuclear-armed North. "In the past, Kim has climbed Mount Paektu ahead of major political decisions," said Shin Beom-chul, an analyst at the Asan Institute of Policy Studies. Kim hiked to the peak in December 2017 before launching diplomatic overtures that led to his first ever summit with US President Donald Trump. But negotiations have been gridlocked since then.

SOURCE: AFP

TURKEY'S OFFENSIVE AGAINST KURDS IN SYRIA

Europe must brace for refugee wave: Greek PM

AFP, Athens

Europe must be ready for the possibility of a new refugee influx, Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said yesterday, as an unfolding Turkish offensive in Syria could see more people flee the conflict-ridden region.

"Europe must be prepared for the eventuality of a new migratory and refugee wave coming through Greece," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told AFP in an exclusive interview 100 days after taking office.

With some 70,000 asylum-seekers on its soil, -- including nearly 33,000 on islands near Turkey -- Greece is concerned that the Turkish offensive against Kurdish-controlled areas will overwhelm already overcrowded camps.

Turkey houses some 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has already threatened to "open the gates" to allow more to leave for Western countries if his plans to resettle them in northern Syria fail.

Mitsotakis, who has already met with Erdogan in New York, rejects this as blackmail.

"The idea that Europe can be blackmailed by a threat of unleashing waves of refugees and migrants within Europe is not acceptable as a proposition," he said.

He added the EU had been "generous" with Ankara, a fact he said was not fully acknowledged by the Turks.

The UN refugee agency this week said Greece in 2019 had received over 46,000 people -- more than Spain, Italy, Malta and Cyprus combined.



A woman gestures in front of a police officer during a students' protest near Plaza Espana square in Barcelona, Spain. Police in Spain yesterday said they arrested 51 people across Catalonia overnight after violent protests over the jailing of nine separatist leaders for their role in a failed 2017 independence bid.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Schiff claims 'dramatic progress'

Says witnesses gave more info on president's alleged misuse of power

AFP, Washington

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT PROBE



investigators in closed-door testimony that several high-level aides reported the Trump-Zelinsky phone call to a White House lawyer as possible wrongdoing by the president.

Hill said her own boss, then-national security advisor John Bolton, characterized Trump's pressure on Zelensky together with Giuliani and White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney as akin to a narcotics transaction.

"I am not part of whatever drug deal Rudy and Mulvaney are cooking up," Bolton said, according to Hill's testimony as reported by the New York Times. Hill said Bolton also warned that Giuliani, who is reportedly under federal investigation over his Ukraine dealings, is "a hand grenade who's going to blow everyone up."

The White House meanwhile Tuesday questioned the investigation's legitimacy by refusing to turn over budget office, Pentagon and vice presidential documents related to the Ukraine dealings.

Schiff spoke a day after former White House Russia expert Fiona Hill reportedly told Congressional

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE 2020

Warren retains lead

AFP, Westerville

Surging White House hopeful Elizabeth Warren defended a barrage of attacks from fellow Democrats at the party's fourth 2020 debate Tuesday, cementing her status as a frontrunner in the race to challenge Donald Trump.

The president himself loomed large as the dozen Democratic contenders trained their fire on him, calling for his impeachment and assailing a Syria troop pullout that Joe Biden slammed as "shameful."

"The impeachment must go forward," thundered Warren, the progressive senator who is neck and neck with former vice president Biden at the head of the 2020 nomination race -- a stance loudly echoed by her fellow Democrats on stage.

Dragged into the scandal, Biden made clear he believes Trump should be impeached -- and pushed back hard on the president's charge he himself intervened in Ukraine to protect his son Hunter.

The other heavyweight in the race -- 78-year-old liberal Senator Bernie Sanders -- suffered a mild heart attack recently.

But it was Warren who weathered the sharpest attacks from her fellow Democrats -- on everything from kitchen-sink issues such as healthcare and taxation, to foreign policy and even business automation.

On health -- a flashpoint issue for American voters -- Warren faced stiff blowback from moderates who challenged her to come clean on how much her "Medicare for All" plan would cost.

Ex-congressman Beto O'Rourke accused Warren -- who advocates a wealth tax on the biggest fortunes -- of "punitive" policies, and "pitting some part of the country against the other."

Hearing wraps up in Ayodhya case

Verdict likely on November 17

AFP, New Delhi

The future of a site that has sparked thousands of deaths in inter-religious violence is set to be decided in coming weeks after India's top court wrapped up hearings in one of the country's longest-running cases.

Hindus believe that Lord Ram, a major deity, was born at the site in the northern city of Ayodhya, and that a Muslim conqueror destroyed a temple there in the 1500s and built a mosque in its place.

In 1992 a Hindu mob reduced the mosque to rubble, triggering some of the worst inter-religious violence since independence in 1947 and in which 2,000 people perished.

In 2002 Hindu activists were burned alive in a train returning from Ayodhya, sparking riots that left upwards of 1,000 people dead, most of them Muslims.

The hearings ended in drama yesterday, as Rajeev Dhawan, a lawyer for one of the Muslim parties in the case, tore up a map purportedly showing the temple existed in ancient India.

Another lawyer, who is in his 90s, has been representing the infant Lord Ram in the case. Under Indian law, a Hindu deity is considered a "juridical person."

The five judges in the Supreme Court are due to decide how the 2.77-acre (1.1-hectare) site should be divided in a verdict expected by November 17.

The ruling Hindu nationalist party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has vowed that a temple will be built there.

Security measures have been enhanced in Ayodhya as the case nears its end, with assemblies of more than four people banned.