



A volunteer carries an injured youth to hospital, following a bomb blast at a mosque in Haska Mina district of Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan yesterday. At least 62 worshippers were killed and dozens wounded by the blast during Friday prayers, officials said, a day after the United Nations said violence in the country had reached “unacceptable” levels.

PHOTO: AFP

Brexit hangs on a knife edge

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Johnson said ahead of the first Saturday sitting of parliament since the 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands.

If he wins the vote, Johnson will go down in history as the leader who delivered Brexit - for good or bad. If he fails, Johnson will face the humiliation of Brexit unraveling after repeatedly promising that he would get it done.

Goldman Sachs said it thought the deal would pass and raised its estimate of Brexit with a deal on Oct. 31 to 65% from 60%. It cut its odds on a no-deal departure to 10% from 15% and kept unchanged its 25% probability of no Brexit.

The pound held at five-month highs of \$1.2874 against the dollar, down from Thursday's peak of \$1.2988.

Johnson won the top job by staking his career on getting Brexit done by the latest deadline of Oct. 31 after his predecessor, Theresa May, was forced to delay the departure date. Parliament rejected her deal

three times, by margins of between 58 and 230 votes.

Downing Street is casting the vote today as a last chance to get Brexit done with lawmakers facing the option of either approving the deal or propelling the United Kingdom to a disorderly no-deal exit that could divide the West, hurt global growth and trigger violence in Northern Ireland.

To win the vote, Johnson must persuade enough Brexit-supporting rebels in both his own Conservative Party and the opposition Labour Party to back his deal.

Concerned about the potential impact of a no-deal departure, Johnson's opponents have already passed a law demanding he delay Brexit unless he gets a withdrawal deal approved by today.

The government has said both that it will comply with this law and that Britain will leave the EU on Oct. 31 whatever happens. Johnson has not explained how he plans to take these two apparently contradictory steps.

The message from Johnson's

advisers is: "New deal or no deal but no delay."

The prime minister was due to hold a cabinet meeting at 1500 GMT yesterday.

As lawmakers mull one of the United Kingdom's most significant geopolitical moves since World War Two, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators are due to march towards parliament demanding another referendum on EU membership.

Parliament will sit from 0830 GMT today. Johnson will make a statement to lawmakers, after which there will be a debate and then a vote. The debate was originally scheduled to last 90 minutes, but is no longer time-limited.

The Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) said it would oppose the deal and lobby a faction of around 28 hardline Brexit supporters in the Conservative Party to do the same.

"We will be encouraging (other lawmakers to vote against) because we believe it does have an impact on

the unity of the United Kingdom, will spark further nationalist sentiment in Scotland and will be detrimental to the economy of Northern Ireland," the DUP's Sammy Wilson said.

"Voting this down tomorrow is not the end of the game, in fact it probably opens up possibilities for the government which are not available at present after a general election."

Without the DUP's 10 votes, Johnson will need Brexit-supporting Labour Party rebels to support his deal.

Yesterday's vote will be "pretty close" but likely just fall short of approval, said John McDonnell, the second most powerful person in the Labour Party.

"I don't believe it will pass, I think it will be defeated but... the numbers are going to be pretty close," McDonnell told Sky News.

If the vote is a tie, then the speaker of parliament, John Bercow, would hold the deciding vote. According to vague convention, the speaker would seek to keep the issue open for further discussion.

IMF raises alarm

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the ongoing trend of growth in the years ahead.

In its recent edition of the World Economic Outlook, the IMF upgraded Bangladesh's growth projection for 2019 from 7.3 percent to 7.8 percent, the third highest in the world.

"Bangladesh has been enjoying a good GDP growth for the last few years, which is quite remarkable," she said.

The trend will continue this year as the country saw a notable foreign direct investment flow in recent months. Furthermore, the ongoing global trade

tensions did not have a negative impact on the Bangladesh economy.

"Rather, it had a quite positive impact on the economy in the form of trade diversion," Gulde-Wolf said.

Bangladesh needs to create a good number of jobs so that the young population benefits from the tremendous growth momentum, she added.

Changyong Rhee, director of APD, said the Asia-Pacific region is faced with a significant growth slowdown as the region has been caught in prolonged uncertainty.

Headwinds from global policy uncertainty and growth deceleration in major trading partners are taking a toll on manufacturing, investment, trade and growth, he said.

"Risks are skewed to the downside. That said, Asia remains the world's fastest-growing region, contributing more than 70 percent to global growth."

While the region has been contributing about two-thirds to global growth over the past few years, the contribution in 2019 is higher due to the concurrent growth slowdown in

other regions.

The near-term outlook for Asia and Pacific points to continued slower growth, driven by protracted global policy uncertainty and slowing growth in China, Rhee said.

The region is projected to grow at 5 percent in 2019 and 5.1 percent in 2020 -- down by 0.4 and 0.3 percentage points respectively from the Washington-based multilateral lender's projections in April.

"This would constitute the slowest expansion since the global financial crisis," Rhee added.

Fastest ant

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A quartet of researchers from the Universities of Ulm and Freiburg in Germany tracked down Cataglyphis bombycina in the Tunisian desert and set up a field lab as a race course.

"Once we had located a nest, it was simply a matter of connecting an aluminium channel to the entrance and placing a feeder at the end to lure the ants out," said lead author Sarah Pfeffer.

"They shuttled back-and-forth in the channel and we mounted our camera to film them from the top." Pfeffer and her team also excavated a nest and transported it back to Germany, where they recorded C. bombycina's running prowess in cooler climes.

As expected, when the temperature dropped to a chilly 10 C the ant slowed down by more than a third.

At top speed, the Saharan silver ant easily outpaces its nearest competitor Cataglyphis fortis -- despite having significantly shorter legs.

It does this by swinging its tiny 5-mm long appendages at speeds of up to 1,300 mm per second.

The length of the ant's strides increased four-fold as the animal shifted into high gear, they found.

The scientists also discovered that -- at its fastest -- C. bombycina switches from running to a gallop, with all six feet off the ground at regular intervals.

Saharan silver ants are active outside their nests for only about 10 minutes a day, during which they search for heat-stricken lizards and other prey that they can pick apart and carry home.

Air raids, shelling test Syria 'truce'

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civilian targets in Ral al Ain.

"Turkey is violating the ceasefire agreement by continuing to attack the town since last night," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali tweeted.

"Five civilians were killed in Turkish air strikes on the village of Bab al-Kheir, east of Ras al-Ain," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said. The Britain-based war monitor said four fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces -- the de facto army of the embattled Kurdish autonomous region -- were killed in the strike.

The deal was aimed at easing a crisis that saw President Donald Trump order a hasty and unexpected US retreat, which his critics say amounted to abandoning loyal Kurdish allies that fought for years alongside US troops against Islamic State.

Trump has praised the deal, saying it would save "millions of lives". White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham told Fox News the ceasefire was successful even if halting fighting "takes time".

Turkey cast it as a complete victory in its campaign to control a strip of territory stretching hundreds of miles along the border and more than 30 km (around 20 miles) deep into Syria, to drive out fighters from the YPG, the SDF's main Kurdish component.

"As of now, the 120-hour period is on. In this 120-hour period, the terrorist organisation, the YPG, will leave the area we identified as a safe

zone," Erdogan told reporters after Friday prayers in Istanbul. The safe zone would be 32 km deep, and run "440 km from the very west to the east," he said.

Erdogan warned that Ankara would restart its operation against Kurdish forces on Tuesday evening if they do not withdraw from the "safe zone".

"If the promises are kept until Tuesday evening, the safe zone issue will be resolved. If it fails, the operation... will start the minute 120 hours are over," Erdogan told reporters during a foreign media briefing in Istanbul.

He said Turkish armed forces would remain in the region "because the security there requires this", adding that there had been no issues so far.

But the US special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, said the agreement covered only a smaller area where Turkish forces were already operating, without giving details of how far along the border Washington believed it stretched.

The Kurds said it was limited to a small strip between two border towns that have seen the bulk of the fighting: Ras al Ain and Tal Abyad, just 120 km away.

However European Council president Donald Tusk said after a meeting of EU leaders that Turkey's US-brokered truce was not serious and demanded Ankara halt its offensive against Kurdish forces.

"The situation is quite obvious. This so-called 'ceasefire' is not what we expected. In fact it's not a ceasefire, it's a demand of capitulation for the

Kurds," he told reporters.

RUSSIA, IRAN FILL VACUUM

With the United States pulling its entire 1,000-strong contingent from northern Syria, the extent of Turkey's ambitions is likely to be determined by Russia and Iran, filling the vacuum created by the US retreat.

The government of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Moscow and Tehran, has already taken up positions in territory formerly protected by Washington, invited by the Kurds.

Jeffrey acknowledged that Turkey was now negotiating with Moscow and Damascus over control of areas where Washington was pulling out, which were not covered by the US-Turkish ceasefire agreement.

LIFTING SANCTIONS? The joint US-Turkish statement released after Thursday's talks said Washington and Ankara would cooperate on handling Islamic State fighters and family members held in prisons and camps, an important international concern.

Pence said US sanctions imposed on Tuesday would be lifted once the ceasefire became permanent.

In Washington, US senators who have criticised the Trump administration for failing to prevent the Turkish assault in the first place said they would press ahead with legislation to impose sanctions against Turkey.

The Turkish assault began after Trump moved US troops out of the way following an Oct 6 phone call with Erdogan.

EC yet to decide on Dhaka city polls

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

With the tenures of the two Dhaka city corporations nearing to an end, the Election Commission is yet to make any decision on declaring the schedule for the next polls.

Tenures of the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) will expire on May 11 and May 14 next year respectively.

The elections should be held by between mid-December this year and mid-May next year.

The EC makes decisions on an election schedule at its meeting. It usually announces a polls schedule about 40-45 days ahead of the polling day.

Talking to The Daily Star, EC Senior Secretary Md Alamgir said they were yet to make a decision regarding the city polls. He said he was not sure when the decision would be taken.

According to the Local Government (city corporation) Act-2009, polls should be held within 180 days before the expiry of the tenure of the incumbent mayor. The tenure begins from the day of holding the first meeting of a city corporation.

The last polls to the two city corporations were held on April 28, 2015. The first meeting of the DNCC was held on May 12 and that of the

DSCC on May 15 that year.

Top EC officials said they were waiting for a decision to start the activities for holding the next city polls. They said the EC would have to consider some issues for fixing a suitable polls schedule.

According to the officials, many schools in the capital will remain busy for their final exams and admission tests in December. Besides, they will be distributing free textbooks to all primary and secondary-level students.

The next year's Secondary School Certificate exam will be held in February. The Higher Secondary School exam is scheduled to be held in April and May.

The DNCC has 54 wards and the DSCC 75 wards. One councillor from each ward is elected directly.

In the April 2015 city polls, the Awami League-backed Annisul Huq and Sayeed Khokon were elected mayors of DNCC and DSCC respectively.

The DNCC mayoral post fell vacant following the death of Annisul on November 30, 2017.

Businessman Atiqul Islam was elected DNCC mayor in the by-election to the city corporation, held on February 28 this year. However, some major political parties, including the BNP, did not participate in the by-election.

US imposes record \$7.5b tariffs on EU goods

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday imposed tariffs on a record \$7.5-billion worth of European Union goods, despite threats of retaliation, with Airbus, French wine and Scottish whiskies among the high-profile targets.

The tariffs, which took effect just after midnight in Washington (0401 GMT), came after talks between European officials and US trade representatives failed to win a last-minute reprieve.

The WTO-endorsed onslaught from US President Donald Trump also comes as Washington is mired in a trade war with China and could risk destabilising the global economy further.

In the line of fire are civilian aircraft from Britain, France, Germany and Spain -- the countries that formed Airbus -- which will now cost 10 percent more when imported to the US.

But the tariffs also target consumer products such as French wine, which Trump had vowed to attack in recent months. Wine from France, Spain and Germany will now face 25 percent tariffs.

Speaking in Washington hours before the tariffs were due to come into effect, France's Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire warned the move would have serious repercussions.

"Europe is ready to retaliate, in the framework of course of the WTO," he told reporters shortly after meeting with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund annual meetings.

"These decisions would have very negative consequences both from an economic and a political point of view."

Le Maire was due to meet US Trade

Representative Robert Lighthizer later yesterday.

He also warned the US against starting another front in its trade conflicts and again called for a negotiated solution.

At a time when the global economy is slowing, "I think that our responsibility is to do our best to avoid that kind of conflict," Le Maire said.

The Europeans have long advocated negotiation over conflict and they themselves will be able to impose tariffs next year to punish the United States for subsidising Boeing.

But EU officials had already offered in July to call a truce on subsidies for planemakers, in which both sides would admit fault and agree to curtail state aid -- to no avail. The two sides have been involved in a row over the subsidies for 15 years.

The tariffs kick in just days after the United States was given the formal go-ahead by the World Trade Organization.

130 gold bars

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suspected that Joynal could be the mule of a gold smuggling ring.

The arrestee had previously visited Bangladesh five times from the UAE and might have smuggled golds during those visits, said Riyadul Islam, a DD of the directorate.

Following a tip-off, Customs officials searched his luggage and found the lamps.

"We broke the lamps and found the gold worth around Tk 6.5 crore," he said.

During primary interrogation, Joynal gave us the names of the people to whom he was to deliver the bars. "We would investigate the matter," he added.

One arrested

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was sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for medical examination.

In the same upazila, Rana Chasha, 25, and his brother Jagadish Chasha, 28, of Gandhichhara village, were sued yesterday for "attempting to rape" a 20-year-old girl and "physically assaulting" her and her mother.

The victim's father said Rana had been stalking her daughter for a long time. "On Thursday evening, he stormed into her room and tried to rape her. I was not home at the time, so my wife came to rescue her hearing screams. Rana then beat my daughter and wife with a bamboo stick before fleeing," he said.

Locals rescued the two and sent them to Sreemangal Upazila Health Complex. The girl's father filed a written complaint with police the next morning, and said Rana's brother Jagadish threatened him before he went to police.

In Rajanagar upazila, a court on Thursday night sent a man to jail for "raping" his 14-year-old stepdaughter several times in the last two months.

Police said the victim's mother found out about the incident after the girl cried out in pain on Wednesday. On the same night, the mother filed a case against her second husband Russell Ahmed, said OC (investigation) of Rajanagar Police Station Abul Kalam. The accused was arrested and sent to jail the next day.