

NEWSIN
brief

Twenty dead in DR
Congo bus accident

AFP, Mbanza-Ngungu

Twenty people were killed early yesterday when a packed bus came off the road on a highway west of the DR Congo capital Kinshasa and burst into flames, a local official said. “The provisional toll is 20 dead,” Didier Nsimba, deputy administrator of Mbanza-Ngungu territory told AFP. An injured passenger who gave her name as Nacha said more than 100 people had been in the vehicle at the time, and many bodies were burned beyond recognition. The bus, laden with people and goods, was travelling from from Lufu to Kinshasa.

5 soldiers, cop killed in
Burkina attacks

AFP, Ouagadougou

Four soldiers and a police officer were killed and 11 more injured in twin attacks early Saturday in the north of Burkina Faso, the army said in a statement. “Military units in Bahn (Loroum province) and Yense (Yatenga province) were targeted by almost simultaneous terrorist attacks” at around 3:00 am, the statement said. “These attacks unfortunately cost the lives of five personnel in the units, including one police officer. Eleven soldiers were also injured,” the statement added.

Niger floods force
23,000 from homes

AFP, Niamey

Floods in southeast Niger have forced 23,000 people to flee their homes since early October, officials said Saturday, threatening a new humanitarian crisis in a region already wracked by Boko Haram Islamist violence. Heavy rains have caused the Komadougou Yobe river that flows through the semi-desert Diffa region into Lake Chad to burst its banks, inundating villages, flooding fields and damaging crops.



US military vehicles drive on a street in the town of Tal Tamar yesterday, after pulling out of their base. *Inset*, A Syrian girl reacts to her wounds in the Syrian border town of Tal Abyad which was seized by Turkey-backed forces last week.

PHOTO: AFP

US pulls troops from key base

Kurdish forces kill Turkish soldier in northeast despite ceasefire

AFP, Tal Tamar

US forces withdrew from their largest base in northern Syria yesterday, a monitor said, as Turkey accused Kurdish forces of killing one of its soldiers in fighting that tested a fragile truce.

Ankara launched a cross-border attack against Syria's Kurds on October 9 after the United States announced a military pullout from the north of the war-torn country.

A US-brokered ceasefire was announced late Thursday, giving Kurdish forces until Tuesday evening to withdraw from a “safe zone” Ankara wants to create along its southern frontier.

The Kurds have been a key ally to Washington in the US-backed fight against Islamic State group jihadists in Syria, but Turkey views them as “terrorists” linked to Kurdish militants on its own soil.

Yesterday, an AFP correspondent saw more than 70 US armoured vehicles escorted by helicopters drive past the northern Syrian town of Tal Tamar carrying military equipment.

Some flew the American stars-and-

stripes flag as they made their way eastwards along a highway crossing the town, he said.

The Syrian Observatory for the Human Rights said the convoy was evacuating the Sarrin military base.

The vehicles appeared to be heading to the town of Hassakeh, further east, said the Britain-based monitor, which

TURKEY-SYRIA BORDER

Truce gives Kurdish forces until
Tuesday evening to withdraw
from ‘safe zone’

SDF commander says Turkey
was blocking his forces’
withdrawal

relies on sources inside Syria for its information.

Sarrin is situated more than 30 kilometres (19 miles) south of the border town of Kobane, on the edges of the Turkish-desired “safe zone,” Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Yesterday's pullout was the fourth such withdrawal of American forces in a week and left Syria's northern provinces of Aleppo and Raqa devoid of US troops, Abdel Rahman said.

Turkey and the Kurds have traded accusations that the other was not abiding by the deal brokered by US Vice President Mike Pence.

Yesterday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Ankara had seen some Kurdish withdrawals.

The top figure on the Kurdish side, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi, has said Turkey was blocking his forces' withdrawal and trying to blame any collapse of the deal on the Kurds.

The Observatory said sporadic clashes were ongoing in the north and northwest of Ras al-Ain, a border town surrounded by Turkish troops and their Syrian proxies.

An AFP reporter said empty neighbourhoods in the northeast of the town were calm.

He saw Turkey-backed fighters playing around on motorbikes and sitting on the pavement smoking cigarettes.

US committed to Afghan peace

Says Pompeo after deadly blasts in eastern Nangarhar

REUTERS, Kabul

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Saturday Washington remained committed to peace and stability in Afghanistan as police searched for bodies in the rubble of a mosque in eastern Nangarhar province where bomb blasts killed at least 69 people.

The explosives that went off during Friday prayers were placed inside the mosque in the Jawdara area of the Haska Mena district. On Friday, local officials had reported the number of dead at 62 and around 50 wounded.

“The United States remains committed to peace and stability in Afghanistan, and will continue to fight against terrorism,” Pompeo said in a statement. “We stand by the people of Afghanistan who only want peace and a future free from these abhorrent acts of violence.”

Sohrab Qaderi, a member of Nangarhar's provincial council, said the mosque, with a capacity of more than 150 worshippers at a time, was full of people when the bombs exploded.

“Bodies of 69 people, including children and elders, have been handed to their relatives,” Qaderi said, adding that more bodies could be lying under the rubble.

No group has claimed responsibility but the government blamed Taliban insurgents, who are fighting to re-impose strict Islamic law after they were ousted from power in 2001 by US-led forces.

Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Taliban, denied the group was responsible. In a tweet, he said that witnesses to the attack said it was a mortar attack by government forces.

Crowds defy HK rally ban

Police, protesters exchange tear gas, petrol bombs; shops, metro stations trashed

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police yesterday fired water cannon and tear gas as crowds held an illegal march, with hard-core protesters throwing petrol bombs and trashing businesses, capping a week of anger after the recent stabbing and beating of two pro-democracy protesters.

Authorities had forbidden the march in Tsim Sha Tsui, a densely-packed shopping district filled with luxury boutiques and hotels, citing public safety and previous violence from hardcore protesters.

But tens of thousands joined the unsanctioned rally regardless, showing the movement can still keep pressure on the city's pro-Beijing leaders after nearly five months of protests and political unrest.

In a familiar pattern, the huge rally began peacefully.

But it soon descended into chaos as smaller groups of hard-core protesters hurled

petrol bombs at police, subway entrances and at Chinese mainland bank branches as well as vandalising multiple shops.

Police responded with repeated volleys of tear gas, rubber bullets and baton charges.

Throughout the afternoon a water cannon truck chased protesters down Nathan Road, one of the city's busiest shopping thoroughfares, leaving it streaked with blue dye from the vehicle's turrets.

The dye, used to identify protesters, also contains a painful pepper solution.

As the protesters fled the streets, frontliners stayed behind to slow the advance of riot police, setting fire to makeshift barricades.

Tensions were running high after the leader of the group organising the weekend rally, Jimmy Sham, was hospitalised by men wielding hammers earlier in the week.

Then on Saturday night a man handing out pro-democracy flyers was stabbed in the neck and stomach, reportedly by an assailant who later shouted pro-Beijing slogans.



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish PM under pressure over Catalan protests

Anti-separatists hold rally in Barcelona

AFP, Barcelona

Ahead of next month's general election, Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez yesterday faced sharp criticism for his handling of violent Catalan separatist protests even as calm returned to Barcelona and other cities overnight.

The centre-right Ciudadanos party, which was born out of opposition to Catalan separatism, held a rally in front of Catalonia's regional government headquarters in Barcelona under the slogan: “That's enough! Justice and coexistence”.

“We have had enough of seeing how radicals roam freely and scare millions of Spaniards on their land. The streets belong to everyone,” Ciudadanos leader Alberto Rivera tweeted before the rally began.

He has called on Sanchez to suspend Catalonia's autonomy just as the central government did in 2017 after the Catalan

parliament declared independence following a banned secession referendum.

The streets of Barcelona and other Catalan cities have been rocked by protests since Spain's Supreme Court sentenced nine separatist leaders, many of them former regional government ministers, last

Monday to jail terms of up to 13 years for sedition over the failed 2017 independence bid.

Nearly 600 people have been injured in clashes with police since the protests started. A police officer was in “very serious condition” and a demonstrator was in “critical condition” according to Barcelona mayor Ada Colau.

In an interview published in top-selling daily newspaper El Pais, the leader of the main conservative opposition Popular Party (PP), Pablo Casado, accused the government of “pretending nothing has happened” and promising that everything will return to normal “with moderation”.



Lebanese demonstrators gather on a highway linking Beirut to north Lebanon, in Zouk Mosbeh yesterday, after demonstrations swept through the eastern Mediterranean country in protest against dire economic conditions.

PHOTO: AFP

Indonesia's Widodo kicks off fresh term

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo was sworn in for a second term yesterday, as helicopters flew overhead and troops kept watch in the capital Jakarta -- days after Islamist militants tried to assassinate his top security minister.

Foreign heads of state, lawmakers and political rivals looked on as Widodo, 58, and Vice President Ma'ruf Amin, 76, read an oath to start a five-year tenure leading the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation.

Outside parliament, red-and-white Indonesian flags dotted parts of the city, but celebrations were muted with supporters outnumbered by some 30,000 security personnel deployed amid fears of another attack.

Demonstrations were also banned yesterday as extremist violence continues to plague Indonesia.

Several thousand supporters, many wearing T-shirts bearing the leader's image, watched the ceremony on a big screen near Jakarta's national monument.

“I was worried Islamic (hardliners) would take over the country if he lost,” supporter Suprihatini, who goes by one name, told AFP.

“I'm Muslim, but I don't want that kind of movement here,” the 53-year-old added.

Widely known as Jokowi, the president said his final term would be aimed at eradicating poverty and catapulting the nation of some 260 million into a developed country with one of the world's top five economies by 2045.

Trudeau in tight race with Scheer

Opinion poll puts Liberals at 32.6% public support and Conservatives at 30.3% ahead of today's vote

REUTERS, Hamilton

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, facing the loss of his Parliamentary majority in an election next week, traded attacks with his main rival on Saturday as a bad-tempered campaign entered its last few days.

Trudeau came to power in 2015 promising “sunny ways” and a new way of doing politics but saw his popularity drop earlier this year amid an ethics scandal. Images of him in blackface emerged last month, further hurting his Liberal Party ahead of the October 21 election.

The 47-year-old prime minister, his voice increasingly hoarse, said Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer would slash spending and rip up Liberal plans to fight climate change.

Polls show the Liberals and the Conservatives in a dead heat, with neither able to capture a majority of the 338 seats in the House of Commons. That would leave the party winning the most seats seeking support of smaller parties to govern.

“I know Canadians want a strong progressive government that would stop Conservative cuts,” Trudeau told a rally in a fire station in the Ontario city of Hamilton, west of Toronto.

In the absence of an overriding narrative, dirty tactics and awkward moments have



CANADA ELECTION

characterized the campaign.

Another example of that was on display on Saturday when People's Party of Canada (PPC) leader Maxime Bernier said his party was considering legal action against the Conservatives after the Globe and Mail newspaper reported that the latter had

hired a consultant to “seek and destroy” the PPC party and try to get Bernier barred from televised leaders' debates.

Bernier, a former Conservative cabinet minister, lost the Conservative leadership race to Scheer in 2017 and started his own right-leaning party. Lagging far behind in polls, the PPC could still split some of the Conservative vote.

“This is the kind of dirty politics that confuse Canadians' faith in politics,” Bernier said at a press conference in Sainte-Marie, Quebec. “He (Scheer) is ready to steal the election with lies and manipulations.”

Scheer, speaking in Toronto, repeatedly refused to answer questions about the report, saying only: “We don't make comments on vendors that we may or may not have engaged with.”

A Nanos Research poll for the Globe and Mail and CTV released on Saturday put the Liberals at 32.6% public support and the Conservatives at 30.3%. The left-leaning New Democrats, who compete for the same voters as the Liberals, were at 18.4%.

Trump abandons plan to host G7 summit at his resort

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday the next G7 summit will not be at one of his own Florida golf clubs, reversing a decision that had sparked corruption accusations. Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney had announced the venue for the summit on Thursday, causing a firestorm among Trump's Democratic opponents in Congress, who called the move “among the most brazen examples yet of the president's corruption.” “Based on both Media & Democrat Crazed and Irrational Hostility, we will no longer consider Trump National Doral, Miami, as the Host Site for the G-7 in 2020,” the president tweeted. “We will begin the search for another site, including the possibility of Camp David, immediately.”

Swiss vote in possible 'green wave' election

Switzerland was counting votes yesterday in an election that could see unprecedented gains for parties demanding bold climate action and a possible slip for the anti-immigrant right-wing. In a country that recently held a funeral march for an iconic glacier that has nearly vanished due to melting, opinion polls indicate that climate change has displaced migration as the top concern among the electorate. That marks one of the most significant shifts in recent Swiss political history, according to the Sotomo political research institute, which forecast that results could generate a “green wave.”

Nigeria rescues 147 from 'torture house': state govt



Police in northern Nigeria have rescued 147 people from an Islamic boarding school where the students were being abused, the fourth such raid in a month, a local official told AFP. Armed officers found the inmates when they raided a school in the Rigasa district of Kaduna, said Hafsat Baba, Kaduna state women affairs commissioner. “All the inmates were found in chains and said they were beaten. There are 22 women among them and some of them complained of being sexually abused,” she added. Two Cameroonians and two people from Niger were among those rescued, she said. There were also four children at the school.

SOURCE: AFP