

# NEWS IN brief

## N Korea: US, S Korea must present solutions

REUTERS, Beijing

The United States and South Korea must present new solutions for the current standoff on the Korean Peninsula, a senior North Korean military official said yesterday, warning that hostile policies towards Pyongyang would lead to serious consequences. The remarks add to recent comments from Pyongyang expressing discontent at the lack of progress in its negotiations with Washington. This month North Korea issued a veiled threat about ending the freeze in long-range missile testing.

## Green Party makes gains in Swiss vote

AFP, Geneva

Switzerland's Green Party made historic gains in national elections Sunday, while the anti-immigrant right wing remained the largest party in parliament despite a slip in its support. Definitive results confirmed a pre-vote forecast that rising concerns about climate change would trigger an electoral "green wave". The results mark "a tectonic shift", said Green Party president Regula Rytz, and the leftwing party called for the "urgent convening of a national climate summit".

## Saudi Arabia's new shisha tax sparks fury

AFP, Riyadh

A decision to impose a 100 percent tax on bills at restaurants that serve shisha has ignited criticism on social media in Saudi Arabia, where the water pipes are a popular pastime. The furore has also been fuelled by confusion over how the tax is applied. In the meantime, some restaurants have stopped offering shisha, while others have lowered their prices to appease customers.

# West 'standing by terrorists'

### Erdogan lashes out at EU, Nato for failing to support Turkey's ops against Syrian Kurds; withdrawing US troops enter Iraq

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday lashed out at Western states, accusing them of "standing by terrorists" in failing to support Turkey's operation against Syrian Kurdish fighters.

"Can you imagine the whole West stood by the terrorists and all attacked us including Nato member states and European Union countries?" Erdogan said in Istanbul.

"Since when did you start to side with terror? Did PYD-YPG (Syrian Kurdish forces) join Nato and we do not know about it?" he asked.

Ankara says the YPG is a "terrorist" offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency inside Turkey since 1984.

The PKK is blacklisted as a terror group by Ankara, the US and the EU.

Ankara's military action against Kurdish forces who played a key role in the fight against the Islamic State group has drawn widespread

international criticism and prompted some Nato countries to suspend new arms sales.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly voiced "serious concerns" about the military



Syrians who have been recently turned refugees by the Turkish military operation are pictured at Bardarash camp in Iraq's Kurdish region.

PHOTO: AFP

operation launched on October 9 to push Syrian Kurdish forces back from the border.

Erdogan denied any territorial

ambition saying: "Turkey does not have an eye on any country's territory ... We consider such an accusation as the biggest insult directed to us."

Turkey has announced a 120-hour suspension of the offensive following a deal with US Vice President Mike Pence, under which Kurdish fighters were to withdraw to allow a "safe zone" to be set up along the border.

Meanwhile, dozens of US armoured vehicles with American soldiers aboard crossed into Iraqi Kurdistan from Syria yesterday.

The withdrawing convoy crossed the Tigris River at the Fishkhabur border post near the Turkish frontier, en route to Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan Region, where there is a US base.

The United States announced the withdrawal of 1,000 American soldiers deployed in northeast Syria on October 13, the fifth day of Turkey's offensive against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara considers a terrorist group.

# Australian newspapers black out front pages

### Call for reforms to protect whistleblowers

AFP, Sydney

Newspapers across Australia yesterday ran heavily redacted front pages in protest against government secrecy and a crackdown on press freedom, a rare show of unity in a fractious media landscape.

National and regional mastheads including The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald and the Australian Financial Review hit newsstands Monday with most of their front-page news stories blacked out.

Advertisements have also been rolled out across the country's television networks, asking viewers to consider the question: "When the government hides the truth from you, what are they covering up?"

The campaign by the Right to Know coalition was sparked by federal police raids on the national broadcaster ABC

and a News Corp journalist's home earlier this year over two stories that had proved embarrassing for the government.

It centres on six demands, including exemptions for journalists from strict national security laws that have created a complex web of provisions critics say too easily ensnare reporters doing their jobs.

"The culture of secrecy that has descended through these legal provisions restricts every

Australian's right to know and goes well beyond the original intent of national security," Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance union head Paul Murphy said.

"The police raids on the home of News Corp journalist Annika Smethurst and the headquarters of the ABC in Sydney were direct attacks on media freedom in Australia but they are just the tip of the iceberg," he said.



Supporters of Catalonia's independence sit on a street holding placards reading "Spain: Sit and Talk" as they attend a protest rally over the jailing of Catalan separatist leaders outside Spanish Government offices in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Chile is 'at war'

### Says president, extends emergency as protest death toll hits 11

AFP, Santiago

Chile is "at war", President Sebastian Pinera said Sunday, as the country reels from three days of violent demonstrations and looting that have left 11 dead and almost 1,500 detained in the worst outbreak of social unrest in decades.

"We are at war against a powerful, implacable enemy, who does not respect anything or anyone and is willing to use violence and crime without any limits," Pinera told reporters after an emergency meeting with army general Javier Iтурriaga, who has been placed in charge of order and security in the capital.

Santiago and nine other of Chile's 16 regions were under a state of emergency, Pinera confirmed late Sunday, with troops deployed onto the streets for the first time since Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship between 1973-1990.

The clashes, which have seen some 9,500 police and military fire tear gas and water cannon against protesters who have set fire to buses, smashed up metro stations and ransacked shops, were sparked by anger over price hikes and social inequality.

Despite a growth rate that should reach 2.5 percent of GDP this year, several social indicators -- such as health, education and pensions -- show very high inequalities.

"Many latent requests have not been answered, tension has built up, frustration has increased daily in daily life," said Octavio Avendano, a sociologist and political scientist at the University of Chile.

This anger boiled over earlier in the week as a protest against a rise in metro fares escalated dramatically on Friday.

## BLUE WATER-CANNON DYE

# HK leader sorry for mosque incident

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's pro-Beijing leader and the city's police chief apologised yesterday as they visited a mosque that was struck with blue dye from a water cannon during the latest bout of violent protests.

The entrance to the Kowloon Mosque, the international hub's largest, was sprayed by a water cannon truck on Sunday, causing anger among both local Muslims and protesters.

Police use the dye -- often mixed with an irritant -- as a way to identify protesters but it has frequently left streets and buildings daubed in a garish blue.

Video footage shot Sunday showed the truck pulling up outside the building during confrontations with protesters, pausing and then spraying around half a dozen journalists and bystanders who were gathered on the street outside.

The group, who did not appear to be protesters, was struck twice, with much of the bright blue jet painting the mosque's entrance and steps. Police released a statement on Sunday saying the mosque was hit by mistake.

Yesterday, Chief Executive Carrie Lam and police chief Stephen Lo paid a brief visit to the mosque, surrounded by a phalanx of security guards.

# Assange in UK court ahead of extradition hearing

AFP, London

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange yesterday appeared in public for the first time in six months, seeming frail and confused during a British court appearance ahead of his extradition hearing.

The 48-year-old Australian is fighting a United States bid to extradite him on charges filed under the US Espionage Act, and sat in the witness box as a London court decided the timetable of his full hearing, due to begin in February.

Although clean shaven and dressed smartly in a blue jacket, blue jumper and dark trousers, Assange appeared confused whenever he was asked to talk at Westminster Magistrates' Court.

He seemed to have difficulties recalling his birth date, and at the end of the hearing told District Judge Vanessa Baraitser that he had not understood what had happened in

court. He then complained about the conditions in which he was being kept at the high-security Belmarsh prison in southeast London.

"I can't access any of my writings, it's very difficult to do anything and these people have unlimited resources, they have an unfair advantage," he said in a barely audible voice.

Assange also suggested that someone had tried to steal his children's DNA before adding: "I can't think properly". It was his first public appearance since being dramatically dragged from Ecuador's embassy in April.

He could be sentenced to spend up to 175 years in a US prison if convicted on all charges.

Baraitser rejected his legal team's request for more time to gather evidence, telling Assange his next case management hearing would take place on December 19, before a full extradition hearing in February.



## STOPPING OF POSTAL MAILS

# India slams Pak

PTI, New Delhi

India yesterday slammed Pakistan for unilaterally stopping postal mail service between the two nations, saying the move was in contravention of international norms.

Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Pakistan resorted to the move without giving any prior notice to India.

"Pakistan's decision is directly in contravention of international postal union norms. But Pakistan is Pakistan," Prasad, who is the minister for Communications and IT, said on the sidelines of an event here.

The minister added that Pakistan "without any prior notice or information has stopped sending postal department's letter to India".

Tensions escalated between the nuclear-armed neighbours after India revoked Kashmir's autonomy on August 5 and imposed movement and communications restrictions to quell unrest.

Kashmir has been split between India and Pakistan since 1947 and was the spark of two wars and numerous skirmishes.

## Thai king strips 'disloyal' royal consort of all titles

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn has stripped his 34-year-old consort of all titles for "disloyalty" and apparent "ambition" to match the Queen's position, a royal command issued late Monday said, less than three months after she was bestowed with the honour. Former royal bodyguard Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi - known by her nickname "Koi" -- was gifted the title on the king's 67th birthday on July 28, the first time in nearly a century a Thai monarch has taken a consort. A few days later the palace released images of the short-haired Sineenat in combat fatigues shooting weapons, flying a jet and preparing to parachute from a plane, as well as holding the king's hand.

## Harry: William and I 'on different paths'

Prince Harry has admitted he and his brother are now "on different paths" and have "good days" and "bad days" in their relationship. The Duke of Sussex has been plagued by rumours in recent months of a rift between him and Prince William, and in an interview with ITV he acknowledged that "inevitably stuff happens" given their high-profile role and the pressure the family faces. Speaking during his recent tour of southern Africa with his wife Meghan Markle, he said: "We are brothers. We will always be brothers. We are certainly on different paths at the moment but I will always be there for him as I know he will always be there for me."

# Exit polls predict win for BJP

TOI, New Delhi

The BJP is predicted to retain power with a hugely improved mandate in both Maharashtra and Haryana, according to the exit polls released yesterday.

In Maharashtra, a poll of six exit polls gives the BJP and Shiv Sena combine 213 seats out of the total 288 seats. The Congress and NCP combine are predicted to win only 61 seats while the other parties may win 14 seats.

In Haryana, a poll of six exit polls gives the BJP 66 seats out of total 90, while the Congress gets only 13 seats and the other parties 11 seats.

If these predictions come true on the day of counting, the BJP will retain power in both the states with a bang, replicating its success story in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

In the outgoing Maharashtra assembly, the BJP had 122 seats, the Shiv Sena 63 seats, the Congress

42 seats and the NCP 41 seats. The other parties had 20 seats.

In Haryana, the BJP had won 47 seats in the 2014 assembly elections. The Congress had 15, the INLD 19 and the other parties had won 9 seats.

The Times Now exit poll has predicted a whopping majority for the BJP-Shiv Sena combine in Maharashtra, with the ruling coalition expected to win 230 seats. While the BJP may win 130 seats, the Shiv Sena may manage 100 seats.

The Congress and the NCP are likely to be decimated according to the exit poll predictions. The Congress may win only 28 seats while the NCP may bag 20.

The ABP-CVoter exit poll predicts 204 seats for the ruling combine in Maharashtra. The Congress-NCP combine is projected to win 69 seats and the other parties may manage only 15 seats.

## STATE POLLS IN MAHARASHTRA, HARYANA



A voter is welcomed by officials before casting her vote at a polling station during the state assembly election in Mumbai, India yesterday.

# Lebanon PM announces reforms to quell protests

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's cabinet approved a raft of economic reforms and agreed on the 2020 budget, Prime Minister Saad Hariri said yesterday.

"These decisions are not designed as a trade-off. They are not to ask you to stop expressing your anger. That is your decision to make," he said in a televised press conference.

The announcement comes amid a growing protest movement, which started five days ago over tax hikes but has evolved into an unprecedented push to remove Lebanon's entire political leadership.

The reforms announced also include cutting of politicians' salaries by half.

Protesters have said this would not be enough to send them home, demanding the demise of politicians they accuse of rampant corruption.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in central Beirut and other cities

Sunday to demand better living conditions and the ouster of a cast of politicians who have monopolised power and influence for decades.

Euphoric crowds partied deep into the night, leaving all political and sectarian paraphernalia at home to gather under the national cedar flag, dancing to impromptu concerts and chanting often hilarious anti-establishment slogans.

Lebanon's economy has been on the brink of collapse for some time and the initial grievances of the protesters were over proposed tax hikes.

But the demonstrations have evolved into a massive push to unseat ruling dynasties widely seen as corrupt beyond redemption, and Hariri's 11th-hour rescue plan was met with disdain on the street.

At the press conference, Hariri said protests across country restored Lebanon national identity, broke sectarian barriers. He also supported protesters' demand for early polls.



## Trudeau fights to retain power as Canada votes



Canadians began voting in a general election yesterday, with surveys predicting that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party could return with a weakened minority government or lose his grip on power entirely. The Liberals and the Conservatives, led by Andrew Scheer, were set for a near dead heat with pundits calling it one Canada's closest elections ever. Polls opened at 1100 GMT in the province of Newfoundland in eastern Canada, the first of the country's six time zones -- with some 27.4 million Canadians eligible to elect 338 members of parliament.