

Two truckers killed in J&K

AFP, SRINAGAR

Two apple truck drivers were shot dead and their vehicles set on fire in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday, in the latest attack on the vital local fruit industry which has been pulled into the conflict between militants and New Delhi.

Tensions have soared since New Delhi's August decision to strip the autonomy of the disputed and restive Himalayan region and impose a security and communication lockdown.

The nearly \$2-billion apple trade has been caught between militants wanting a shutdown of the local economy in protest at India's actions, and New Delhi which wants to restore normality.

The two drivers, who were from outside Kashmir, died late Thursday in the southern Shopian district, a militant stronghold, after gunmen sprayed their vehicles with bullets, police said. A third driver was also injured.



A building is engulfed in flames at a vineyard during the Kincade fire near Geyserville, California on Thursday. Some 50,000 people were ordered to flee their homes north of Los Angeles on Thursday as a fast-moving wildfire driven by high winds raged out of control. No injuries were reported so far.

US to secure Syria oilfields

Moscow, Damascus deploy forces to Syria-Turkey border

AFP, Qamishi

Damascus and Moscow deployed extra forces yesterday to Syria's border with Turkey, even as Washington partially reversed a drawback to boost its own military presence near key Syrian oil fields.

The United States earlier this month announced a pullout from Kurdish-held areas in northeast Syria, allowing Damascus, Ankara and Moscow to carve up the Kurds' now-defunct autonomous region.

Late Thursday, however, the United States said it would beef up its presence in the northeast near key oil fields.

Washington would do so "with additional military assets to prevent those oil fields from falling back to the hands of ISIS or other destabilising actors," a Pentagon official said, referring to IS but without providing numbers.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies on October 9 launched a cross-border attack against Kurdish-held areas, grabbing a 120-kilometre-long (70-mile) swathe of Syrian land along the frontier.

The deadly incursion killed hundreds and caused 300,000 people to flee their homes in the latest humanitarian disaster in Syria's brutal eight-year war.

This week, Turkey and Russia struck a deal in Sochi for more Kurdish forces to withdraw from the frontier on both sides of that Turkish-held area under the supervision of Russian and Syrian forces.

Before dawn yesterday, an AFP stringer saw a convoy of hundreds of regime troops arriving in the border town of Kobane.

Moscow, for its part, said 300 Russian military police had arrived in Syria to help ensure Kurdish forces withdraw to a line 30 kilometres (18 miles) from the border in line with Tuesday's agreement.

Under the Sochi deal, Kurdish forces have until late Tuesday to withdraw from border areas at either end of the Turkish-held area, before joint Turkish-Russian start patrols in a 10-kilometre (six-mile) strip there.

Ankara eventually wants to set up a so-called "safe zone" on Syrian soil along the entire length of its 440-kilometre border, including to resettle some of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey.

Meanwhile, human rights groups on Friday accused Turkey of already "forcibly" having deported refugees to war-torn Syria in the months leading to its attack.



Boeing design flaw a factor in Lion Air crash

AFP, Jakarta

A design flaw, inadequate pilot training and poor flight crew performance contributed to a Boeing jet crashing in Indonesia last year, killing all 189 people on board, investigators said yesterday.

The Lion Air disaster was followed months later by a second crash -- involving the same model of aircraft -- when an Ethiopian Airlines plane went down with 157 people aboard, leading to the global grounding of Boeing's entire 737 MAX fleet.

The crashes had thrown a spotlight on the MAX model's Manoeuvring Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), an anti-stall mechanism, that pilots in both planes had struggled to control as the jets careered downwards.

Yesterday, Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee said there were flaws in Boeing's design of the anti-stall system and of its certification by US regulators.

"The design and certification of this feature was inadequate," a summary of the report said, referring to the MCAS.

The MCAS was vulnerable to a sole sensor that it relied on for inputs, and 737 MAX pilots were not properly briefed on how to handle a malfunction, it said.

"The aircraft flight manual and flight crew training did not include information about MCAS," the report said.

A sensor on the doomed jet's system was "miscalibrated" and the problem was not caught by Lion Air maintenance crews, it said, after the plane's previous flight also experienced loss-of-control problems.

Yesterday, following the release of the Indonesian report, Boeing expressed its "heartfelt condolences" to victims' families, and said it had since fixed the flight-control system's software.

Erdogan sues magazine over 'eradicator' cover

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has launched legal proceedings against a French magazine which branded Turkey's president "The Eradicator" after he sent troops into Syria to push back Kurdish forces, media reported Friday. The complaint was filed against Le Point director Etienne Gernelle and the head of the magazine's international service Romain Gubert, the official Anadolu news agency reported. On this week's cover Le Point published a picture of Erdogan giving a military salute with the subtitle "Ethnic cleansing: the Erdogan method", provoking sharp criticism from Turkish government officials. The cover's headline called Erdogan "The Eradicator" and asked: "Will he be allowed to massacre the Kurds -- and threaten Europe?"

Offshore wind power set for 15-fold increase: IEA

Offshore wind could become Europe's largest single source of electricity and its use for power generation is set to increase 15-fold worldwide by 2040, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said yesterday. In its annual assessment of the clean energy source, the IEA said that falling costs, supportive government policy and technological breakthroughs could see as much as \$1 trillion (900 billion euros) invested in growing capacity. The EU and China are set to lead the transition towards more wind power, with offshore capacity in Europe set to surge from 20 to 130 gigawatts by 2040 under current policy and pricing. The IEA said the EU's capacity could jump as high as 180 gigawatts if member states reach their carbon-neutrality aims. China's capacity is predicted to rise from 4 gigawatts today to 110 by the same date, overtaking Britain as possessing the largest offshore wind fleet of any country. Offshore wind currently provides just 0.3 percent of global power generation.

Japan trade minister resigns over donation scandal



Japan's new trade minister yesterday said he had submitted his resignation after being accused of violating election law by offering voters money and gifts, local media said. Isshu Sugawara has been in the hot seat after a magazine reported he was suspected of paying 20,000 yen (\$185) to a bereaved family in his constituency and of giving gifts to other voters. The amounts, while small, would constitute a violation of Japan's public office election law. Sugawara submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe after a cabinet meeting, public broadcaster NHK reported. Sugawara was appointed in a recent cabinet reshuffle but has not taken over the key portfolio of handling trade negotiations with the United States.

Facebook 'news tab' seeks to reboot its role with media

AFP, Washington

Facebook yesterday began rolling out its dedicated "news tab" with professionally produced content -- the latest move by the social network to promote journalism and shed its reputation as a platform for misinformation.

The tab, being tested with some US users, will be separate from a user's normal feed and include articles from partner news organizations.

The mix of stories in Facebook News will be determined by algorithmic "personalization" based on an user's preferences and data, and by actual journalists choosing content.

"I've been talking to news publishers and journalists for a few years about how we can do more to support high quality journalism on Facebook," Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said.

The new tab is "dedicated to high quality news and personalized to your interests," he wrote on his Facebook page.

The company said users would have "more control over the stories they see, and the ability to explore a wider range of their news interests, directly within the Facebook app."

Facebook is expected to pay some of the news organizations that will contribute but has yet to disclose full details.

The social network has partnered with some 200 news organizations including The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The Washington Post, CBS News, BuzzFeed, Fox News, the Boston Globe, Bloomberg and Vanity Fair.

Facebook said it would begin an initial test rollout which would "showcase local original reporting" from publications in major cities "beginning with New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Philadelphia, Houston, Washington DC, Miami, Atlanta and Boston."

Topic sections will include business, entertainment, health, science and technology, and sports.



Iraqi protesters carry a wounded comrade during anti-government demonstrations in Baghdad, yesterday. At least six demonstrators were killed in renewed clashes in the Iraq yesterday, as protesters in the south set fire to the government's provincial headquarters and various party offices. Earlier this month, anti-government protests killed more than 150 people.

PHOTO: AFP

2 arrested for human trafficking

REUTERS, Grays

Police investigating the deaths of 39 people in a truck near London said they had arrested a man and a woman yesterday on suspicion of human trafficking amid signs that some of the dead may be Vietnamese.

As forensic experts began the process of identifying the victims, a human rights activist said at least one of them might have been a Vietnamese woman. Police have said they believe the dead were Chinese but Beijing said the nationalities had not yet been verified.

Police said they had detained the man and woman, both aged 38, in Warrington, northwest England, yesterday on suspicion of conspiracy to traffic people and of 39 counts of manslaughter.

The 25-year-old truck driver remains in custody after being arrested on suspicion of murder following the discovery of the bodies in the back of his refrigerated truck in the early hours of Wednesday.

He has not been formally identified but a source familiar with the investigation named him as Mo Robinson from the Portadown area of Northern Ireland. Detectives will decide later whether to charge him with an offence, release him or ask a court for more time to question him.



LORRY HORROR IN UK

The victims - 31 men and eight women - are being moved to a hospital mortuary from a secure location at docks near the industrial estate in Grays about 20 miles (30 km) east of London where the bodies were found.

Post-mortem examinations were beginning to determine how exactly they died while forensic experts sought to identify the deceased.

Hoa Nghiem from Human Rights Space, a civic network based in Vietnam, said at least one of the deceased might have been Vietnamese.

Pham Thi Tra My, 26, sent a text message to her mother saying she could not breathe at about the time the truck container was en route from Belgium to Britain, Hoa said.

"I'm sorry Mom. My path to abroad doesn't succeed. Mom, I love you so much! I'm dying bcoz I can't breath ... I'm from Nghen, Can Loc, Ha Tinh, Vietnam ... I am sorry, Mom," the message said according to Hoa.

She said Tra My had gone to China and was planning to reach England via France.

"Our contact is getting more alerts that there could be more Vietnamese people in the truck," Hoa said on Twitter.

4 million slum dwellers in Delhi to win property rights

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, Bangkok

Almost 2,000 informal settlements in Delhi are set to be legalised under a new law agreed by the government this week, which ministers said would give more than 4 million residents the right to own their homes in India's capital.

India's cabinet this week passed a bill to regularise 1,797 unauthorised slums in the country's most populous city, giving residents ownership rights at "minimal rates" that would enable them to build and sell properties and take loans.

Mapping is to begin shortly, according to a statement from the ministry of housing and urban affairs, with the bill due to be presented for passage during the next session of parliament from mid-November.

"It will transform the lives of more than 40 lakh (4 million) residents who came to Delhi in search of a better life and livelihood but were forced to live in squalor," said Housing Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

"Besides providing a legitimate claim to the property, the decision will encourage property holders to invest in safe structures, thereby improving living conditions in these colonies substantially," he said at a press briefing this week.

The plan to regularise Delhi's unauthorised settlements had been floated for more than a decade. Most inhabitants are migrant workers from other parts of India who cannot afford regular housing in the city of more than 18 million people.

Under the proposed law, authorities will map the boundaries of the slum areas, and prepare a plan. Residents will have to provide basic documentation and pay a nominal charge to register their property and receive the title, Puri said.

Worldwide, about 1 billion people live in slums and informal settlements. By 2030, 3 billion people will lack access to adequate and affordable housing, according to UN-Habitat, the United Nations' settlements agency.

NEWS IN brief

16 killed in anti-Abiy protests in Ethiopia

AFP, Addis Ababa

At least 16 people have been killed in violence in Ethiopia this week that began with protests against Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Abiy Ahmed, an Amnesty International researcher said yesterday. He said the violence had included instances of security forces opening fire on protesters but was increasingly taking the form of ethnic and religious clashes.

Trump snubs 'fake' Times, Post

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump doesn't like what he reads in two of America's biggest newspapers, The New York Times and Washington Post -- so he won't be getting them any longer. Trump on Monday had told Fox News that he didn't want to get the papers because they are "fake." White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham also told The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) that the White House plans to require all federal agencies to cancel their subscriptions to the two newspapers.

Yemen strikes deal with southern rebels

AFP, Riyadh

Yemen's southern secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) has struck a power-sharing deal with the internationally-recognised government, sources on both sides said yesterday. The deal would see the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) handed a number of ministries, and the government return to the southern city of Aden, according to officials and reports in Saudi media.