

NEWS IN brief

Landslide kills 42 in Cameroon

At least 42 people were killed after their houses were swept away Tuesday in a landslide caused by torrential rain in the western Cameroon city of Bafoussam, state media reported, showing images of rescuers desperately sifting through rubble for survivors. Cameroon President Paul Biya offered his condolences to families of the victims in a message broadcast on CRTV.

Turkey-Russia joint patrols start Friday

Turkish-Russian joint patrols will start in Syria on Friday, Turkey's president said yesterday, after the Kremlin said Syrian Kurdish fighters had withdrawn under a deal between Ankara and Moscow. Erdogan said Russian authorities informed Ankara that some 34,000 members of the "terror group" have withdrawn -- together with 3,260 pieces of heavy weaponry -- from a zone running 30 kilometres from the Turkish-Syrian border.

UN split on China's Uighur rights record

China's mass detention and surveillance of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang province came under fire at the United Nations Tuesday, with 23 nations -- mostly western -- backing a British statement condemning Beijing's human rights record. But China's allies countered with a statement of their own that won even broader support, with some 54 nations, including Pakistan, Russia, Egypt, backing a Belarus text that heaped effusive praise on Beijing's "remarkable achievements in the field of human rights."



South African Police officers arrest a refugee who was camping outside the UN high Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office, in Cape Town, yesterday. Police yesterday arrested around 100 foreign nationals occupying an office building in Cape Town as part of a sit-in protest against xenophobia. Protesters were holding a sit-in for 24 days over the safety of foreign nationals in the city.

'Selected', not elected

Pak cleric launches march to capital to oust PM Imran

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan faces the first major challenge to his leadership as a grey-bearded, orange-turbaned rival he calls "Maulana Diesel" marches to Islamabad with thousands of Islamists hoping to bring down the government. Maulana Fazlur Rehman -- one of the country's most seasoned political operators -- has dominated the airwaves in recent days with his calls to unseat his old adversary Khan. The prime minister, he says, did not win last year's election, but was "selected" by the powerful security establishment -- a suggestion denied by Khan, but spread widely by Pakistan's opposition since even before the July 2018 election. "This movement will continue until the end of this government," Rehman told reporters ahead of the march. "There is no other way... to bring Pakistan back on the democratic path." Rehman, who heads the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) -- one of the country's largest Islamist parties -- has been leading supporters from across Pakistan for days on a "Azadi (Freedom) March" towards Islamabad, with tens of thousands expected to converge on the capital. He says they will arrive by October 31, but so far has refused to clarify what happens next. With the ability to mobilise tens of thousands of madrasa students, JUI-F protests have a history of stirring unrest, and authorities are sealing off the capital's diplomatic enclave with shipping containers.

IS insider gave up Baghdadi for \$25m US bounty: report

US commandos zeroed in on Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's final hideout with the help of an extraordinarily well-placed informant, an IS operative who facilitated the terrorist leader's movements around Syria and even helped oversee construction work on his Syrian safe house, according to US and Middle East-based officials knowledgeable about the operation. The mole's detailed knowledge of Baghdadi's whereabouts, as well as the room-by-room layout of his sanctuary, proved to be critical in the October 26 raid that ended with the death of the world's most-wanted terrorist, reported The Washington Post citing the officials. The informant was present during the assault on Baghdadi's compound in the Syrian province of Idlib, and he was exfiltrated from the region two days later with his family. The man, whose nationality had not been revealed, is expected to receive some or all of the \$25 million US bounty that had been placed on Baghdadi's head, according

to the officials. One official said he was a Sunni Arab who turned against the IS because one of his relatives had been killed by the group. The IS defector had been cultivated



as an asset by the Syrian Democratic Forces, the predominantly Kurdish militia that became the ground troops for the US-led campaign to destroy the terrorist group's self-proclaimed caliphate in eastern Syria. SDF leaders then handed control of the agent to US intelligence operatives, who spent weeks vetting him until they were sure he was genuine, the officials said. A months-long effort to exploit the intelligence breakthrough began

in the summer, but only in the past month did the informant's tips lead to an opportunity to act. The Washington Post previously reported the contributions of a disaffected IS operative in exposing the location of Baghdadi's hideout. SDF leader Gen. Mazloum Abdi told NBC News on Monday that one of his organization's informants had helped lead the Americans to Baghdadi's compound, and said personal items, including underwear, were taken from the compound for DNA testing to confirm Baghdadi's presence in the building. US special operations commandos struck the hideout overnight Saturday, swooping in on helicopters and chasing the IS founder into a tunnel where he detonated a suicide vest, according to the US account of the raid. Baghdadi's head was apparently intact after the explosion, and US operators were convinced of his identity even before a field DNA test was conducted for confirmation, the official said.

Watchdog slams 'draconian' curbs on Pak news anchors

A journalism watchdog has condemned a "draconian" decision by Pakistani authorities ordering news anchors not to express their opinions on air, the latest in a series of assaults on press freedom in the South Asian country. The statement by Reporters Without Borders, released late Tuesday, came after Pakistan's Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) sent the directive to TV channels Sunday, sparking an outcry from some of the country's most prominent news anchors. The statement asks anchors to refrain from commenting on matters that are "under trial" in the courts. But later it adds that only "unbiased" analysts with "requisite" knowledge should be invited to speak on any subject, and warns that anchors must stick to moderating only, excluding their "personal opinions, biases and judgements on any issue". Pakistan's many television channels

host multiple current affairs and politics programmes with often lively discussions of the day's events. But the space for dissent has been shrinking fast in recent months, with rights activists voicing concerns and many journalists already practising self-censorship so as not to cross the powerful army, which has ruled the country for roughly half its history. "It is not the media regulator's role to dictate who can express opinions during debates, or to decree what can or cannot be said," said Daniel Bastard, the head of Reporters Without Borders' Asia-Pacific desk, in a statement. "This grotesque PEMRA directive not only violates journalistic independence and pluralism but even goes so far as to criminalize opinions," he said. RSF said the PEMRA directive was sent after television journalists commented last week on the release of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, bailed from prison on health grounds.



An anti-Brexit demonstrator wearing an EU flag-themed witch's hat holds a cardboard banner outside the Houses of Parliament in London, yesterday.

Stand by India in fight against terrorism

Say EU MPs after Kashmir visit

Termed Article 370 an internal issue of India, EU parliamentarians visiting Jammu and Kashmir yesterday said they stand by the country in its fight against global terrorism. Addressing a press conference on the last day of their two-day visit to the Valley, the group of 23 members of European Parliament also condemned the killing of five labourers from West Bengal by terrorists on Tuesday. "If we talk about Article 370 it is India's internal matter. What concerns us is terrorism which is a global menace and we should stand with India in fighting it. There was an unfortunate incident of killing of five innocent labourers by terrorists. We condemn it," said Henri Malosse from France. He said the team got a briefing from the army and police as well as young activists and exchanged "ideas of peace". Newton Dunn from the UK described the visit, aimed at getting a first-hand assessment of the situation after the revocation of the state's special status under Article 370, as an "eye-opener". "We belong to a place Europe which is peaceful after years of fighting. And we want to see India becoming the most peaceful country in the world. And for that we need to stand by India in its fight against global terrorism. This visit has been an eye opener and we would definitely advocate what we have seen on ground zero," he told reporters.



Iraqi PM main backers agree to remove him

Iraq Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's two main backers have agreed to work to remove him from office as protests against his government gained momentum in Baghdad and much of the Shia south only to be met with violence. Populist Shia Muslim leader Muqtada al-Sadr, who leads parliament's largest bloc, had asked Abdul Mahdi to call an early election. When the premier refused, he called on his main political rival Hadi al-Amiri to help remove him. Al-Amiri, who leads a parliamentary alliance of Iran-backed Shia militia that holds the second-largest number of seats in parliament, issued a statement late on Tuesday agreeing to help remove the prime minister. At least 250 have been killed since the unrest started on October 1.

Thai king fires royal guards for 'adultery'

Thailand's king has sacked four royal guards, two of them for "adultery", in a fresh wave of palace purges a week after his royal consort was stripped of all titles for "disloyalty". Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn, 67, ordered the dismissal of two male guards from the "bedroom section", the Royal Gazette announced late Tuesday. "They have committed inappropriate acts and adultery," the statement said. The other two officers failed to meet the standards of the royal guard and were dismissed without compensation, according to the gazette. Vajiralongkorn ascended the throne in 2016.

Greta Thunberg declines environmental award

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg on Tuesday refused to accept an environmental award, saying the climate movement needed people in power to start to "listen" to "science" and not awards. The young climate activist, who has rallied millions to her "Fridays for Future" movement, was honoured at a Stockholm ceremony held by the Nordic Council, a regional body for inter-parliamentary cooperation. Thunberg had been nominated for her efforts by both Sweden and Norway and won the organisation's annual environment prize. But after it was announced, a representative for her told the audience that she would not accept the award or the prize sum of 350,000 Danish kroner (about \$52,000), the TT news agency reported.

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

Democrats unveil plans for public hearings

House Democrats unveiled plans Tuesday to open up the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump with public hearings, after criticism from Republicans that the process has been overly secretive. The White House responded that it still considers the proceedings a "scam," signaling no let-up in Trump's strategy of trying to prevent the investigation from going ahead. Democrats deny that they have been secretive, arguing that five weeks of closed hearings -- in which Republican lawmakers participated -- were necessary for evidence-gathering, ahead of the public portion of the inquiry into the accusation that Trump pressured Ukraine to investigate a political rival. On Tuesday, Democrats proposed legislation for the next stages of the process, giving Republicans the right to call their own witnesses and subpoena records. The House Intelligence Committee will then govern the process of firming up evidence from testimony and documents, with both sides equally able to question witnesses in a public setting. The third stage will see the evidence against Trump forwarded to the Judiciary Committee to draw up articles of impeachment, which would be voted on by the entire House. The Senate would then vote on whether to convict and remove Trump from office.

Joy in Armenia, fury in Turkey

US House passes resolution recognising 'Armenian genocide'

Armenia rejoiced but Turkey was furious yesterday after the US House of Representatives passed a historic resolution recognizing mass killings of Armenians a century ago as genocide. With tensions already high over Turkey's assault on Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Syria, US lawmakers voted 405 to 11 on Tuesday in support of the measure to "commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance." The move was a first for the US Congress, where similar measures with such direct language have been introduced for decades but never passed. The resolution says the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923 amounted to genocide, a claim recognised by some 30 countries. Turkey strongly denies the accusation of genocide and says that both Armenians and Turks died as a result of the First World War. It puts the death toll in the hundreds of thousands. Ankara was swift to condemn the US vote, summoning the American ambassador to Ankara and calling it a "meaningless political step". "This step which was taken is worthless and we do not recognise it," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised speech. Ties between Washington and Nato member Turkey have been strained by Ankara's offensive against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, which came after US forces withdrew from the area. The House also passed a measure on Tuesday imposing sanctions on senior Turkish officials involved in the Syria offensive. The international recognition of the killings as genocide has long been the top priority of Armenia's foreign policy, supported by vigorous campaigning by Armenian diasporas around the world. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hailed the House move. The Armenian foreign ministry said the resolution was of "profound significance" and thanked US lawmakers for "their overwhelming commitment to truth, justice, humanity and solidarity, and to universal values of human rights." The sentiment was shared by Armenians on the streets of the capital Yerevan. "I am so happy that the US has finally recognised the Armenian genocide," said 69-year-old cobbler Koryun Hakobyan. "Other countries will now follow suit." In April 2015, on the centenary of the killings, the Armenian Church conferred sainthood on victims of the massacres.

