

NEWSIN
brief

42 killed in Haiti
protest violence

AFP, Geneva

At least 42 people have been killed and dozens injured during anti-government protests in Haiti since mid-September, the UN's human rights body said Friday, adding it was "deeply concerned" by the crisis. The poorest country in the Americas has been roiled for two months by protests, which were triggered by fuel shortages but have turned violent and morphed into a broader campaign against President Jovenel Moise.

California fires force
more evacuations

AFP, Los Angeles

Californian firefighters tackled fresh and fast-moving wildfires overnight Thursday, making headway against a number of major blazes that have forced mass evacuations and power cuts. Three rapidly moving infernos broke out Thursday in the southern part of the state, burning several homes and forcing people to flee. The blazes come as California is still reeling from the aftermath of the most destructive wildfire in state history -- the Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 86 people last year.

US imposes new
sanctions on Iran

AFP, Washington

The United States said on Thursday it had imposed sanctions on the Iranian construction sector and trade in four materials used in its military or nuclear programs. As a result, the sale of raw and semi-finished metals, graphite, coal, and software for integrating industrial purposes will be sanctionable if the materials are to be used in Iran's construction sector, the department said in a fact sheet.

Treatment of
Assange may
cost his life
Warns UN expert

AFP, Geneva

The treatment of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is facing the threat of extradition from Britain to the US on espionage charges, is putting his life "at risk", an independent UN rights expert said yesterday. "Unless the UK urgently changes course and alleviates his inhumane situation, Mr. Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life," the UN special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, Nils Melzer, said in a statement. Melzer, who visited the 48-year-old Australian whistleblower in a London prison on May 9, nearly a month after his arrest at Ecuador's embassy where he had been holed up for seven years, has previously



warned he was being subjected to drawn-out "psychological torture". The independent expert, who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, has not met Assange since, but he told AFP in an email that his growing concern was based on "new medically relevant information received from several reliable sources." This information, he said, indicated that "Mr Assange's health has entered a downward spiral of progressively severe anxiety, stress and helplessness typical for persons exposed to prolonged isolation and constant arbitrariness."



Supporters of Islamic political party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) wave flags during an anti-government "Azadi (Freedom) March" in Islamabad, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

No Brexit, no US trade deal

Trump criticises Johnson's divorce terms with EU; UK defends

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office has defended his Brexit deal with the EU, after US President Donald Trump warned it would make it impossible for the two nations to strike a future trade agreement.

The president, whose impeachment in the US has moved a stage closer following a key vote in Congress, waded into the British election campaign on Thursday to criticise Johnson's divorce terms with the European bloc.

"This deal... you can't do it, you can't trade. We can't make a trade deal with the UK," he said.

But a Downing Street spokesman later said the deal would allow the UK to strike "our own free trade deals around the world from which every part of the UK will benefit".

Trump's comments appear at odds with his previous pledge in September that he was working closely with Johnson to strike a "magnificent trade deal" once Britain left the EU.

The US president also launched a stinging attack on the country's main opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn and urged Johnson to unite with eurosceptic hardliner Nigel Farage, a key figure in the 2016 referendum on European Union membership.

"Corbyn would be so bad for your country," Trump told Farage during a phone interview broadcast on his talkshow on British radio station LBC.

"He'd take you in such a bad way. He'd take you into such bad places."

"I'd like to see you and Boris get together... I think it'd be a great thing," Trump added.

Within minutes of the interview airing, Corbyn shot back on Twitter that "Trump is trying to interfere in Britain's election to get his friend Boris Johnson elected".

EU critic Farage yesterday urged Johnson to follow Donald Trump's advice and join forces with his Brexit Party in Britain's pre-Christmas general election.

"Without wanting to hurt Boris Johnson, he told the truth about this shocking, awful EU treaty," Farage told LBC radio yesterday

morning. "It's doubtful even by 2023, we would even be in a position to have a trade deal with the USA," he added.

"If that applies to America, that applies to Japan, it applies to India, it applies to Australia. For goodness sake, Boris, drop the deal and let's start again with a clean sheet."

He promised to use his party's campaign launch to explain "the need, in my view, for some kind of Brexit alliance" with Johnson's Conservatives.

Labour leader Corbyn would be 'so bad' for Britain: Trump

EU critic Farage urges Johnson to listen to Trump



ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS IN PAKISTAN

Pak PM told to
resign in 48 hrs

AFP, Islamabad

Tens of thousands of Islamists rallied alongside opposition supporters in Pakistan's capital yesterday, as the firebrand cleric leading the protests called on Prime Minister Imran Khan's government to step down within 48 hours.

The so-called "Freedom March" is being led by Khan's long-time rival Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads one of the country's largest Islamist parties, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F).

As the first day of demonstrations stretched into the night Rehman focused his ire on the country's powerful military, which he and other opposition figures have accused of helping the former cricket star win last year's election.

Protesters waved black-and-white striped JUI-F flags and chanted slogans as a series of opposition figures and Islamist leaders spoke ahead of Rehman's address.

"The time has arrived for us to get rid of this illegitimate government," Shehbaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, told protesters. Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also addressed the rally.

The protest represents the first major challenge to Khan's administration as it struggles to quell simmering public anger over a faltering economy and double-digit inflation.

The first day of the protest has remained peaceful so far.

China says it won't
allow dissent in HK

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday warned it would not tolerate any challenge to Hong Kong's governing system, as it laid out plans to boost patriotism in the city and change how its leader is chosen or removed after months of pro-democracy protests.

Beijing also said it would brook no foreign interference in Hong Kong affairs as it discussed the unrest in the semi-autonomous city at a major, four-day meeting of the Communist Party chaired by President Xi Jinping, according to a senior party cadre.

The former British colony has been rocked by months of protests with citizens lampooning the city's pro-Beijing leaders and erosion of basic rights.

Shen Chunyao, director of the Hong Kong, Macau and Basic Law Commission, said party leaders at the meeting in Beijing agreed to "further improve the central government's system of governance over the region" and maintain its "long-term prosperity and stability."

China, he added, would "never tolerate any act" that aims to split the country or endanger national security.



Filipinos light candles on apartment-style graves for their departed loved ones on All Saints Day at a public cemetery in Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Asean to push for progress
on China-backed trade pact

AFP, Bangkok

Southeast Asian leaders will race to get a sprawling China-backed trade pact over the line at a regional meeting in Thailand this weekend, as Beijing's bruising trade war with Washington rumbles on.

If signed, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will be the world's largest trade pact and is seen as a way for Beijing to cement trade ties in Asia as Washington retreats from the region.

Leaders are hoping for a breakthrough in RCEP talks at this weekend's meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) after seven years of negotiations over the deal, which would comprise 30 percent of global commerce and half the world's population if signed.

But members risk losing steam after dozens of rounds of negotiations and several missed deadlines to sign the pact.

Commerce ministers met yesterday after an hours-long negotiation session to hammer out sticking points, as India digs in over concerns its market will be flooded with cheap made-in-China goods.

"There is one last step that every country has to find the solution to," said Thai commerce minister Jurin Laksanawisit at the start of the meeting.

Chinese premier Li Keqiang will attend the three-day summit in Bangkok -- officially kicking off today amid a backdrop of heavy security -- where simmering tensions in the South China Sea will also top the agenda.

Indian PM Narendra Modi will also be there, as he battles fears at home that key industries like metals, textiles and dairy could be hard-hit by RCEP, which loops in 10 Southeast Asian economies along with Japan, India, New Zealand and Australia.

New Delhi's foreign ministry said Thursday "critical" issues remain to be ironed out.

In what is being read by some as a snub to this weekend's meeting, the US will send national security advisor Robert O'Brien and commerce chief Wilbur Ross. US Vice President Mike Pence attended last year's Asean summit in Singapore, and President Donald Trump was at the 2017 meeting in the Philippines.