

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



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



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.

SAFE ZONE PLAN IN NORTHERN SYRIA

Turkey begins joint patrols with Russia

AFP, Derbasiyeh

Turkey yesterday started joint patrols with Russia in northern Syria to verify whether Kurdish forces have withdrawn from a key border zone in compliance with a deal reached between the two governments.

The patrols, which began just before noon (1000 GMT), follow an agreement they signed in the Black Sea resort of Sochi last week which gave Kurdish forces 150 hours to withdraw from a band of territory along the border, in a process that Russia said was now complete.

They add to the complicated mix of forces operating along the frontier, including US troops who patrolled an eastern section on Thursday for the first time since US President Donald Trump said last month the troops were withdrawing.

Last week's Sochi agreement halted a Turkish operation launched against Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria on October 9, which left hundreds dead and prompted tens of thousands to flee their homes.

Under the deal, Turkey is to assume control over one 120 kilometre (75 mile) wide section in the centre of the border, while Syrian government forces are to deploy to the east and west.

Along the whole length of the border, a 10-kilometre-deep buffer zone is to be created on the Syrian side which will be jointly patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops.

Turkey intends to set up a "safe zone" 30 kilometres deep, in which some of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees it is hosting could be resettled.

Spain likely to host COP25

REUTERS, Santiago/Madrid

Spain will likely host the United Nations' COP25 climate change summit in Madrid, following Chile's withdrawal as host amid raging street protests in the South American nation, a Spanish government source said.

The summit is aimed at fleshing out details of the implementation of the landmark Paris Agreement climate pact, amid calls for urgent action from environmental groups and climate protesters.

The Spanish government said in a statement earlier on Thursday that Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was ready to do what was needed to host the summit in Madrid.

A formal decision on hosting the summit in Madrid will be taken on Monday, the source said on Thursday.

"It is nearly done, we have every chance of getting it," the source said.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera said Sanchez had offered to host the summit in Spain on the same days as previously scheduled, between Dec. 2 and Dec. 13.

"I hope that this generous offer from the president of Spain... represents a solution," Pinera said. "We have shared this information with the leading authorities at the United Nations."

The so-called Conference of the Parties (COP) is the formal meeting of parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

A spokesman earlier on Thursday said the UNFCCC was waiting to receive an official letter from Spain offering to host the talks and would then organize a meeting to assess the offer.

Chile's withdrawal is the first time that a nation has pulled out of hosting the conference with just a month to go.

Violent riots in recent days have left large parts of capital Santiago shut down, with its vital metro transport system suffering nearly \$400 million in damage.

Trump to move permanent residence to Florida

US President Donald Trump announced Thursday that he will change his permanent residence from New York to Palm Beach, Florida, claiming he had been "treated very badly" in his native city. "My family and I will be making Palm Beach, Florida, our Permanent Residence," the president tweeted. According to a report from The New York Times, Trump -- who is a native New Yorker -- and his wife Melania filed individual declarations of domicile in September changing their primary residence from Manhattan to Palm Beach. The New York Times also wrote that White House officials declined to say why Trump changed his primary residence but cited a source close to the president as saying it was primarily for tax purposes.

Protests in Bolivia: President Morales calls for 'truce'

President Evo Morales called Thursday for a "truce" while an international body conducts an audit of Bolivia's disputed election results, after clashes between rival groups left two dead and nearly 140 injured. A technical mission from the Organization of American States (OAS) has begun an audit of the results that delivered Morales a controversial fourth term, and sparked deadly riots. The European Union and United States are among the foreign powers calling for a runoff. Bolivia's first indigenous president, Morales has been in power since 2006. Already Latin America's longest-serving leader, Morales is looking to remain in power until 2025 with a fourth term, despite the country's constitution limits a president to two successive terms.

Maskless Merkel braves severe Delhi smog



German Chancellor Angela Merkel got a toxic welcome to India yesterday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed her in air so polluted that authorities declared a public health emergency. Ignoring medical advice to the choking megacity's 20 million inhabitants, the pair did not wear pollution masks as they inspected troops at the presidential palace in New Delhi. Merkel thanked Modi for the "very warm and gracious welcome" as the two sides signed a series of agreements in agriculture, maritime technology, "green urban mobility" and even yoga. She and Modi also agreed to "deepen efforts to restart negotiations" on a free-trade deal between the European Union and India, with talks stuck since 2013.

SOURCE: AFP