

NEWSIN  
brief

Britain halts fracking

AFP, London

The British government yesterday called a halt to the controversial process of “fracking” due to fears it could trigger earthquakes in a surprise U-turn just weeks before a general election where environmental issues are expected to feature prominently. Until now, Britain had hoped that fracking -- banned in many countries, but booming in the United States -- could help secure its future energy independence. According to the National Audit Office, opposition among Britons has risen to 40 percent from 21 percent since 2013.

Russian air strike kills 6 civilians in Syria

AFP, Beirut

An air strike by key Damascus ally Russia killed six civilians including a child in the embattled opposition bastion of Idlib in northwestern Syria, a war monitor. The strike hit the village of Jabala in the south of the Idlib region, taking the lives of all six from the same family, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said yesterday. The observatory said it was the bloodiest such Russian air raid in two months since Moscow announced a truce for the surrounding area on August 31.

Thai ‘Wild Boars’ cave reopens for visitors

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand has reopened the cave where 12 young footballers and their coach were trapped last year in a saga that captivated the world. The Tham Luang cave has been closed to visitors since the Wild Boars football team were rescued alive after nearly three weeks inside the grotto’s waterlogged corridors. But the world-famous cave in northern Chiang Rai province was re-opened Friday, drawing some 2,000 tourists in a single day, a local conservation official told AFP.



(from left, clockwise) Riot police detain anti-government protesters during a march billed as a global “emergency call” for autonomy, in Hong Kong, yesterday; a woman passes by a Starbucks shop that was vandalized; and volunteers help wash spray paint from a woman’s eye. Police fired tear gas to disperse clutches of black-clad protesters across Hong Kong after they set fire to metro stations and vandalised shops in some of the worst violence to hit the city in recent weeks.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

HONG KONG PROTESTS

Tear gas fired as thousands defy police

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police fired tear gas and water cannon yesterday as thousands of pro-democracy protesters hit the streets, defying authorities with another unsanctioned march after Beijing vowed to tighten its control over the unrest-plagued city.

Crowds of black-clad protesters, many wearing face masks despite a recent ban, filled Causeway Bay, a popular shopping district, and clashes soon erupted as riot police tried to scatter them.

Sustained volleys of tear gas were fired throughout the afternoon on the main island while a water cannon truck chased groups of activists as they blocked roads, built barricades and vandalised some businesses -- including smashing the windows of China’s state-run Xinhua news agency office.

Police were seen making multiple arrests throughout the day.

The latest clashes came after China warned on Friday that it would not tolerate any challenge to Hong Kong’s governing system and planned to boost patriotic education in the city, which has seen 22 consecutive weekends of youth-led protests.

Hong Kong has been upended by the huge, often violent, pro-democracy protests which have battered the financial hub’s reputation for stability and helped plunge the city into recession.

Beijing has shown no willingness to meet protester demands for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability -- and activists show no sign of leaving the streets.

Beijing runs Hong Kong under a “one country, two systems” model that grants the city freedoms unheard of on the authoritarian mainland. But many activists fear those freedoms are being eroded by a resurgent Beijing, particularly since President Xi Jinping came to power.



Pak army backs ‘elected govt’

The statement comes after opposition gave PM Imran 48-hrs to resign

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan’s powerful military said it supported the country’s elected government and the constitution, as tens of thousands of opposition protesters gathered in the capital demanding that Prime Minister Imran Khan’s year-old government quits by Sunday.

“We believe in the law and the constitution and our support is with the democratically elected government, not with any party,” military spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor said in comments to a television news channel late on Friday.

Earlier on Friday, the opposition had demanded that cricket star-turned-politician Khan and his administration resign within two days, raising the stakes in a protest campaign that the government has denounced as a threat to democracy.

The opposition says Khan’s government is illegitimate and is being propped up by the military, which has ruled Pakistan for about half of its history and sets security and

foreign policy.

The military denies meddling in politics and Khan has dismissed the calls to step down.

The leader of the protest, religious party chief Fazl-ur-Rehman, told a rally of tens of thousands of supporters that he did not want a “collision with institutions”, a thinly veiled reference



to the military, and called on them to be impartial.

Ghafoor said Rehman should know the military was impartial and it should not be dragged into politics.

Rehman, leader of the conservative Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl party, is a veteran politician who can mobilise

significant support in religious schools across the country.

He was joined at the Friday rally, which police estimated was attended by 35,000 people, by leaders of the two main opposition parties.

Protesters were camped out at the rally site yesterday, cooking food and resting.

Rehman had earlier warned of chaos if the government did not step down, but on Friday he told the crowd they would decide what action to take if their two-day sit-in at the rally site failed.

Security is tight in Islamabad with the government and diplomatic sector - just a few kilometres from the rally - sealed off, with shipping containers used to block roads.

Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa on Friday urged the government to handle the protest peacefully.

The government, struggling to get the economy on track, has denounced the protests as a threat to the constitution and to democracy

and has said it will not be allowed to paralyse the capital.

UK LORRY TRAGEDY

All 39 victims are from Vietnam

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam yesterday said that it “strongly condemns” human trafficking, after British police confirmed 39 people found dead in a truck last week are believed to be Vietnamese.

Most of the victims are thought to come from central Vietnam, where easy-to-find brokers help to arrange trips to Europe -- often via Russia -- for migrants hoping to earn money overseas.

The extreme risks of the journeys were laid bare after eight women and 31 men were found dead in a refrigerated container in Essex, east of London, on October 23.

Two people were arrested in central Ha Tinh province for human trafficking on Friday, as British police sought more suspects.

Officials are now working to identify the victims after DNA samples were collected from families in Ha Tinh and Nghe An provinces in central Vietnam.

The grim case has shocked Britain and plunged families in remote Vietnamese villages into grief. It has also cast a light on sophisticated transnational trafficking networks helping to smuggle migrants into Britain.

Meanwhile, more than 30 migrants from Pakistan have been found hidden in a lorry in southern France, prosecutors said yesterday. They said the driver, who was also from Pakistan, was detained.

Attack on Mali military post kills 49 soldiers

AFP, Bamako

A “terrorist attack” on a military post in strife-torn northeastern Mali has left 49 soldiers dead, the army said yesterday, revising downward an earlier death toll.

The assault on Friday at Indelimane, in the Menaka region, close to the border with Niger, was one of the deadliest strikes against Mali’s military in a region wracked by Islamist violence.

The Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) “have recorded 49 dead, three wounded and material damage, and some 20 survivors have been recovered,” it said on its Facebook page yesterday.

“The situation is under FAMA control.”

The government on Friday had said 53 people died in what it described as a “terrorist attack.”

No group immediately claimed responsibility.

An army officer said troops arrived at the outpost around 5pm on Friday and “took back control of our positions. “The terrorists carried out a surprise attack at lunchtime. Army vehicles were destroyed, others taken away,” he told AFP.

Mali’s army has been struggling in the face of a jihadist revolt that has spread from the arid north to its centre, an ethnically mixed and volatile region.

The recent assaults are also a humiliation for the so-called G5 Sahel force -- a much-trumpeted initiative under which five countries created a joint 5,000-man anti-terror force -- and for France, which is committed to shoring up the fragile region.

Northern Mali came under the control of Al-Qaeda linked jihadists after Mali’s army failed to quash a rebellion there in 2012. A French-led military campaign was launched against the jihadists, pushing them back a year later.



Palestinian men walk around a crater caused by an Israeli airstrike launched in response to rocket fire, in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. Palestinian militants fired a barrage of rockets at Israel and the Israeli military responded with a wave of pre-dawn air strikes in Gaza killing one man yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Merkel urges Delhi to go green amid smog crisis

Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel urged greater efforts to clean up New Delhi’s toxic air as she pledged one billion euros to help Indian cities switch to green transport. Merkel became a rare foreign leader to speak out on India’s smog crisis after being exposed to the capital’s air on Friday, when authorities said the pollution had reached “emergency” levels. Schools were ordered closed until Tuesday and all construction halted, while Delhi authorities started distributing millions of anti-pollution masks to children. The same day, Merkel went on a ceremonial parade in the city with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday as the smog intensified. Neither leader wore masks.

Landmine kills nine children in Afghanistan

A landmine explosion killed nine children in northeastern Afghanistan yesterday, an official said, amid an increase in civilian casualties in the long-running and brutal war. The blast happened in volatile Darqad district of Takhar province, when the children stepped on a mine that had been planted on a road in a Taliban-controlled village. “At 8:30am (0400 GMT) this morning, tragically, nine schoolchildren were martyred in a landmine blast planted by the Taliban,” Jawad Hejri, a spokesman for the Takhar provincial governor, told AFP. He said the children -- all boys -- were aged from seven to 11. No group claimed responsibility for the blast, and the Taliban did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Iran unveils new anti-US murals at former embassy



Iran yesterday unveiled new anti-American murals on the walls of the former US Embassy as Tehran prepares to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the storming of what it labels the “den of spies”. The accusatory message of the paintings was one of a violent US that is thirsty for war and bent on tightening its grip on the world, yet weakening despite its military might. One of them showed a crumbling Statue of Liberty, its right torch-bearing arm having broken off. Another depicted the triangle of the Eye of Providence, the symbol used on the back of the US dollar bill, in a sea of blood in which skulls are floating. Another work showed an Iran Air plane that was shot down by an American warship over the Gulf on July 3, 1988, with white doves flying out of it. 290 people were killed in the tragedy which Washington has called a “mistake” and for which Iran has for years demanded an apology.

SOURCE: AFP

‘INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS’

UN chief warns of a world of confusion, disinformation

Says societies pay price if journos can't do their jobs in safety

UNB, Dhaka

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned of a ‘world of confusion and disinformation’ if journalists are not allowed to work freely.

He also said societies as a whole pay a price when journalists are targeted and their voices are muzzled.

“Without journalists able to do their jobs in safety, we face the prospect of a world of confusion and disinformation,” the UN chief warned in a statement released marking the ‘International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists’, which falls on Nov 2.

Almost 90 percent of those responsible for the killing of 1,109 journalists around the world from 2006 to 2018 have not been convicted, according to a new Unesco report.

He said without the ability to protect journalists, their ability to remain informed and contribute to decision-making, is severely hampered.



Unesco, in a report said, it has so far recorded fewer killings in 2019 than at the same time last year, with 43 journalist killings condemned by the organisation’s director-general as of October 30, 2019 compared to 90 at the same date in 2018.

The new Unesco report titled ‘Intensified Attacks, New Defences’ has been published marking International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI).

It noted an 18 percent increase in killings of journalists in the past five years (2014-2018) compared to the previous five-year period.

According to the report, the Arab States constituted the deadliest part of the world for journalists (30% of global killings), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean region (26 %) and the Asia and Pacific States (24%).

The report shows that in the past two years (2017-2018), 55% of journalists’ killings took place in non-conflict zones.

Asean hankers for trade deal amid US-China spat

AFP, Bangkok

Southeast Asian leaders yesterday met in Thailand eyeing a breakthrough in talks over the world’s largest trade deal to help throw off the torpor which has gripped the global economy since the start of the US-China tariff war.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) opened their annual summit in Bangkok hoping to secure a China-backed free trade pact knitting together half of the world’s population and around 40 percent of its commerce.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a deal spanning India to New Zealand that has been wrangled over for several years.

It is now seen as an urgent counterpoint to US protectionism, but a trade delegate from the Philippines said a deal was unlikely until 2020.

Washington’s trade rumble with Beijing has weighed on markets, with the IMF warning the spat could cut global growth to the lowest pace in more than a decade.

Philippines’ trade secretary Ramon Lopez said he hoped to have a “very positive report (on RCEP) come Monday” when the summit ends.

But the treaty’s signing would happen “within next year”, Lopez added, and members will meet in February to sort out “pending issues on market access”.

India, whose Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also in Thailand, is the greatest obstacle to RCEP in its current form. New Delhi fears opening key industries such as metals, textiles and dairy to cheaper Chinese importers.

Indian intransigence has cast the deal -- looping in the 10 Southeast Asian economies along with Japan, India, China, New Zealand and Australia -- into doubt.

Chinese premier Li Keqiang will attend the three-day meet, where simmering tensions in the South China Sea will also lead the agenda.

China supports RCEP, a deal seen as a way for Beijing to assert its trade dominance in its Asian backyard after the US pullout of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017.