

NEWSIN  
brief

UN chief seeks int'l  
accord on jihadists

AFP, Paris

UN chief Antonio Guterres yesterday called for an international accord on the fate of foreign jihadists being held in the Middle East, saying it was not up to Syria and Iraq “to solve the problem for everyone.” The call came after Ankara, which has criticised Western countries for not taking back Islamic State group (IS) fighters, on Monday began deporting foreign jihadists being held in Turkish prisons to their countries of origin.

Pneumonia deadliest  
child killer: aid groups

AFP, Paris

Pneumonia is the world’s deadliest child killer, with a “forgotten epidemic” claiming one young life every 39 seconds, international health and children’s agencies warned yesterday. The disease is preventable but still kills more children -- 800,000 under the age of five last year -- than any other infection, they said in a statement to mark World Pneumonia Day. The numbers make grim reading and compare with 437,000 under-fives dying last year due to diarrhoea and 272,000 to malaria.

Labour suffers ‘cyber  
attack’ ahead of polls

AFP, London

Britain’s main opposition Labour party yesterday said it had suffered a “large-scale cyber attack” which undermined some of its campaign efforts for next month’s election. It said that some campaign activities were slowed on Monday but they were restored early yesterday and were now back to normal. Labour said it had reported the incident to the National Cyber Security Centre, which monitors and works to protect security systems.



Police fire tear gas towards protesters at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in Hong Kong, yesterday. Inset, A protester is being arrested near the university. PHOTO: AFP

City on ‘brink of total breakdown’

Say Hong Kong police as clashes rage; western powers urge restraint

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police yesterday fired tear gas in the Central financial district, over the harbour in Mong Kok and at universities to break up pro-democracy protests which they said were leading the city to the “brink of total breakdown”.

The clashes came a day after police shot a protester at close range and a man was doused with petrol and set on fire in some of the worst violence in the Chinese-ruled city in decades.

A flash mob of more than 1,000 protesters, many wearing office clothes and face masks, rallied in Central for a second day during lunch hour, blocking roads below some of the city’s tallest skyscrapers and most expensive real estate.

After they had dispersed, police fired tear gas at the remaining protesters on old, narrow Pedder Street. Police made more than a dozen arrests, many pinned up on the pavement against the wall of luxury jeweller Tiffany & Co.

“Our society has been pushed to the brink of a total breakdown,” a police

spokesman told a briefing, referring to the last two days of violence in the former British colony.

He said masked “rioters” had committed “insane” acts, such as throwing trash, bicycles and other debris onto metro tracks and overhead power lines, paralysing the transport system.

He said the man set on fire on Monday was still in critical condition and appealed for information on who was responsible.

Police also fired tear gas at City University in Kowloon Tong, beneath the Lion Rock, and at Chinese University on the other side of the mountain, where protesters threw petrol bombs and bricks at police.

Protesters at City University had stockpiled bricks and petrol bombs on the bridges and other approaches and were making small devices with nails. They had overrun the campus and were smashing up the next-door Festival Walk shopping mall and setting fires.

Police also fired tear gas in the nearby new town of Tai Po and in the densely populated Kowloon district of Mong Kok, whose shopping artery Nathan Road has

been the scene of many clashes.

The violence prompted western powers to urge Beijing and Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam to find a compromise with protesters who are seeking greater democratic freedoms and police accountability.

Britain said the latest violence was “deeply disturbing”. The United States condemned “unjustified use of deadly force” in Hong Kong.

Carrie Lam said protesters were being extremely selfish and hoped that universities and schools would urge students not to take part in the demonstrations.

More than 260 people were arrested on Monday, police said, bringing the total number to more than 3,000 since the protests escalated in June. Schools and universities were closed yesterday.

Protesters are angry about what they see as police brutality and meddling by Beijing in the freedoms guaranteed under the “one country, two systems” formula put in place when the territory returned to China from British rule in 1997. China denies interfering and has blamed Western countries for stirring up trouble.

RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN BRITISH POLLS

Hillary slams UK  
for hiding report

AFP, London

Hillary Clinton yesterday said it was “shameful” that the British government had not published a delayed parliamentary report into possible Russian interference in British politics ahead of December elections.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government has previously rejected claims it was suppressing the report to avoid a scandal ahead of next month’s snap poll.

“Every person who votes in this country deserves to see that report before your election happens,” the defeated US presidential candidate told BBC Radio 4 during a book tour.

Clinton said there was “no doubt” that Russia is “determined to try to shape the politics of western democracies”.

“Not to our benefit, but to theirs,” said the Democrat, who lost the 2016 US election to President Donald Trump in a race that US intelligence chiefs have said was marred by Russian interference.

“I find it inexplicable that your government will not release a government report about Russian influence. Inexplicable and shameful,” she told BBC Radio 5 Live.

Britain’s parliament was previously told a report by the Intelligence and Security Committee was sent to the prime minister for approval on October 17.

The probe into suspected Russian covert actions in Britain’s democratic process reportedly includes examining whether Moscow tried to interfere with the 2016 Brexit vote and the 2017 general election.

Moscow has been accused of spearheading sophisticated disinformation campaigns around the world to further its interests.

Macron: Global system  
in ‘unprecedented crisis’

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said that the global political system was in “unprecedented crisis”, urging new kinds of alliances and cooperation to solve the world’s problems.

Macron’s warning came days after the publication of an interview in which the president argued Nato was experiencing brain death and Europe risked becoming insignificant, in comments that sent shockwaves around EU capitals.

“We are experiencing an unprecedented crisis in our international system,” he told the Paris Peace Forum, a France-backed group promoting global peace. The president said that “new ways of cooperation, new alliances” are needed between states and organisations, complaining that the United Nations itself has become “blocked”.

Macron lamented that while the global political and financial systems have worked well after World War II, they are now in crisis.

“The system was efficient for 70 years but it allowed new inequalities to emerge,” the president said, adding: “A crisis of our democracy allowed unilateralism to be reborn.

“We need more cooperation to respond to these challenges,” he said, warning against reluctance to question existing international institutions.

Macron’s interview with The Economist, published Thursday, described by analysts as a revealing expose of the president’s views, caused controversy in Europe.

Possibly taking aim at his critics, Macron said Tuesday that plain-speaking was essential.

“I think we need the truth. Squeamishness or hypocrisy won’t work. Silence is not a solution,” he said.



A vehicle burns in the yard of a house on Bullocky Way, Possum Brush, south of Taree in the Mid North Coast region of NSW, Australia, yesterday. Fires raged across a swathe of Australia’s east coast yesterday, destroying more homes and shrouding Sydney in smoke from a blaze authorities fear they will be unable to control until next week. The bushfires have consumed more than a million hectares of land and claimed three lives so far. PHOTO: REUTERS

DEADLOCK OVER GOVT FORMATION

Maharashtra placed  
under president’s rule

PTI, New Delhi

Indian State of Maharashtra was placed under president’s rule yesterday amid a stalemate over government formation after the assembly polls last month.

The Union Cabinet had earlier in the day recommended president’s rule in the state after governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari submitted a report in this regard, officials said.

President Ram Nath Kovind has signed a proclamation imposing president’s rule in Maharashtra, they said.

In his report, the governor said a situation has arisen that a stable government is not possible even after 15 days of election results being declared, according to officials.

All possible efforts have been made but he saw no probability of a stable government in the state, the governor said.

After the BJP declined to form the government and the Shiv Sena failed to get letters of support from the NCP and the Congress, Koshyari had on Monday night asked the NCP to form government in the state by 8:30pm yesterday.

However, the Governor noted that the NCP yesterday morning conveyed to him that the party needed three more days to gather requisite support. The governor felt that as already 15 days had passed, he was not in a position to give more time, the officials said.



J&K marks 100th day of  
communication blockade

A communications blockade imposed by the Indian government in disputed Jammu and Kashmir became 100 days old yesterday, the longest in the insurgency-ridden region. On the night of Aug. 4, hours before abrogating 76-year-old legislation granting autonomy to the Muslim-majority state, the Indian government blocked phones and the internet and deployed tens of thousands of soldiers “for maintaining law and order”. A few thousand landline phones were declared operational in early September and postpaid mobile phone services were restored on Sept. 14. Text messaging was restored the same day but was withdrawn hours later. Broadband and mobile internet services remain suspended.

Chemical attack at China  
kindergarten injures 51

More than 50 people, mostly children, were injured by a man who broke into a kindergarten in southwest China and sprayed them with corrosive liquid, local authorities said yesterday. The suspect, a 23-year-old surnamed Kong, entered the kindergarten by climbing a wall before spraying victims with sodium hydroxide, said local authorities in Kaiyuan city, Yunnan province. The attack took place on Monday at 3:35 pm. Some 51 children and three teachers were admitted to hospital for treatment, two with “severe symptoms”. Police arrested Kong, whom local authorities described as psychologically distorted, less than an hour after the attack.

Three actors stabbed on  
stage in Saudi capital

A Yemeni man stabbed three actors at a performance in the Saudi capital, police said yesterday, in the first such attack since the ultra-conservative kingdom began easing decades-old restrictions on entertainment. The knife-wielding assailant was arrested after state television footage showed him storming a musical performance in Riyadh’s King Abdullah Park by what appeared to be a foreign theatre troupe. Police said the victims were in stable condition after the attack late Monday. Police identified the assailant as a 33-year-old Yemeni expatriate but did not give details of his motive or the nationality of his victims. Prince Mohammed has introduced mixed-gender concerts, re-opened cinemas and lifted a decades-old ban on women drivers as part of a drive to modernise the Muslim kingdom in a bid to diversify its economy away from oil. SOURCE: AFP

BOLIVIA CRISIS

Morales leaves for  
Mexico amid unrest

AFP, La Paz

Bolivia’s Evo Morales was en route to exile in Mexico yesterday, leaving behind a country in turmoil after his abrupt resignation as president.

As the nation suddenly found itself without a leader, the military agreed to help police take back streets lost to violence from disgruntled supporters of Bolivia’s first indigenous president. The senator set to succeed Morales as interim president, Jeanine Anez, pledged to call fresh elections to end the political crisis.

Bolivia appeared increasingly rudderless after dozens of officials and ministers resigned along with Morales, some seeking refuge in foreign embassies.

Morales left the country on a military plane sent for him by Mexico, which granted him political asylum for his safety. Mexican foreign minister Marcelo Ebrard confirmed Morales was on the plane.

“It pains me to leave the country for political reasons, but I will always be watching. I will be back soon with more strength and energy,” Morales tweeted.

The crisis touched off by his resignation Sunday -- after three weeks of protests over his disputed re-election -- deepened Monday as gangs unhappy with his departure attacked police stations and civilians, triggering panic in the streets.

Overwhelmed police asked for help from the army, which pledged to help. Three people have died in clashes since the disputed election.

Do-it-yourself temple waits to  
move into Ayodhya site

AFP, Ayodhya

Huge slabs of pink Rajasthan stone, carved pillars and bricks from across India are already waiting to form a Hindu temple to be built on the site of a demolished mosque at the centre of decades of deadly turbulence.

Enough stone to build a small mountain was waiting at a complex in the holy city of Ayodhya years before the country’s Supreme Court ruled on Saturday that the site should be handed over to Hindus to build a new temple.

A mosque stood on the site for almost five centuries until it was demolished by Hindu zealots in 1992, sparking riots across the country in which 2,000 people, mainly Muslims, died.

Dozens of stonemasons and artisans have been chipping away at the blocks since an



appeal for contributions toward a “grand Hindu temple” in Ayodhya was launched in 1990, without knowing when, or whether, the building would be erected. Cash donations and bricks were sent from around the world.

The workers went back to their home towns and villages just before Saturday’s long-awaited verdict, which said Muslims would get their own land on a new site to build a mosque.

After decades of litigation and religious strife, Hindus rejoiced at the ruling. Activists, priests and pilgrims have since thronged the Nyas Karyashaala workshop, a few kilometres from the contested site where Hindus believe the god Rama was born.

“We never lost faith. We always believed that a grand temple would be built,” Sharad Sharma, a spokesman for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad told AFP at the site.

“Almost 65 percent of the

stone and pillars needed for the temple are ready. Our designs have also been approved by a gathering of religious leaders,” Sharma added.

A model of the “approved” temple is on display at the entry to the noisy workshop.

The new temple would use about 170,000 cubic feet of stone and will be 38 metres (125 feet) tall and 81 metres (270 feet) long, Sharma said.

Media reports have said construction could start as early as next year. The Supreme Court directed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist government to form a trust to oversee the planning and building work.

“So many of us dreamed of this moment for decades,” Brijmohan Das, a Hindu holy man associated with the movement told AFP.

“It is finally happening in our lifetime.”