

NEWS IN
briefVenice braced for
third major flood

AFP, Venice

Venice was braced yesterday for an unprecedented third major flooding in less than a week, with sea water due to swamp the already devastated historic city where authorities have declared a state of emergency. The city forecast "acqua alta", or high water, of 160 centimetres (over five feet) for just after midday, lower than Tuesday's 187 centimetres – the highest level in half a century -- but still dangerous.

Louisiana re-elects
Democratic governor

AFP, Washington

Louisiana re-elected its Democratic governor Saturday in a fresh blow to US President Donald Trump, who campaigned heavily in the state. Governor John Bel Edwards, a conservative Democrat defeated a Republican opponent Eddie Rispone. The outcome is widely seen as the latest barometer on the value of Trump's endorsement for Republican candidates ahead the 2020 elections. Edwards is the Deep South's only Democratic governor.

Lebanon tycoon
forgoes PM job

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's former finance minister has backed down from becoming the protest-hit country's new prime minister, after reports of his nomination sparked ire among demonstrators railing against the ruling elite. Wealthy 75-year-old businessman Mohammed Safadi said Saturday it would be difficult to form a "harmonious" government in the country rocked by a month of unprecedented nationwide protests demanding radical reform. The tycoon said in a statement that he hoped outgoing prime minister Saad Hariri, who resigned on October 29 under pressure from the street, would be reinstated.



A protester runs after throwing a Molotov cocktail at the police outside the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong, yesterday. Inset, A protester aims an arrow at police near the university.

PHOTO:
AFP

HK campus protesters fire bows and arrows, set fires

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong protesters shot bows and arrows and hurled petrol bombs from a barricaded university campus yesterday, as police charged and charged again, firing tear gas and blue liquid from water cannon after fiery clashes overnight.

Several protesters fired arrows from rooftops at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University amid some of the most dramatic scenes in over five months of unrest in the Chinese-ruled city.

Police said a media liaison officer was hit in the leg by an arrow. He was taken to hospital for treatment. A metal ball bit another officer in the visor, but he was not wounded.

Protesters stripped down to their underwear, before being hosed down by colleagues with fresh water to wash off the dye, not knowing what it contained.

Police also fired tear gas to try to break up protesters on the artery of Nathan Road in the Kowloon district of Mong Kok.

One police officer hit by an arrow

Violence at unis some of the worst in months of pro-democracy protests

In the university courtyard, civil engineer Joris, 23, said he would be prepared to go to jail in his fight against the government. Those shooting arrows were protecting themselves, he said.

Chinese soldiers in a base close to the university were seen monitoring developments with binoculars, some dressed in riot gear with canisters on their chests.

Huge fires had lit up the sky at the university in the heart of Kowloon district overnight as protesters hurled petrol bombs, some by catapult, and police fired volleys of tear gas to draw them on to the open podium of the red-brick campus.

The clashes spread into yesterday evening, with protesters greeting each water cannon charge with petrol bombs. Police were trying to clear the bridge above the Cross-Harbour Tunnel, where protesters took cover behind umbrellas.

Protesters set fire to debris on the bridge, in turn setting off a series of small explosions, forcing many to flee.

Human rights groups and outside experts say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been rounded up in a network of internment camps across the far-western region.

The 403 pages of internal papers obtained by the Times provide an unprecedented look into the highly-secretive Communist Party's controversial crackdown, which has come under increasing international criticism, especially from the United States.

AP, Beijing

A rare and huge leak of Chinese government documents has shed new light on a security crackdown on Muslims in China's Xinjiang region, where President Xi Jinping ordered officials to act with "absolutely no mercy" against separatism and extremism, The New York Times reported.

Human rights groups and outside experts say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been rounded up in a network of internment camps across the far-western region.

The 403 pages of internal papers obtained by the Times provide an unprecedented look into the highly-secretive Communist Party's controversial crackdown, which has come under increasing international criticism, especially from the United States.

The documents include previously unpublished speeches by Xi as well as directives and reports on the surveillance and control of the Uighur population, the newspaper said on the weekend.

The leak also suggests that there has been some discontent within the party about the crackdown.

Documents include Xi's directives on controlling Uighur population: NYT

Documents were leaked by an unnamed member of political establishment

The documents were leaked by an unnamed member of the Chinese political establishment who expressed hope that the disclosure would prevent the leadership, including Xi, from "escaping culpability for the mass detentions", the Times said.

In a 2014 speech to officials made

SC JUDGEMENT IN AYODHYA CASE

Muslim body to file review plea

Refuses 5-acre plot for mosque

PTI, Lucknow

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) yesterday decided that it would file a petition seeking review of the Supreme Court's judgement in the Ayodhya case and said it was against accepting the alternative five-acre plot given for a mosque.

"The land of the mosque belongs to Allah and under the Sharia, it cannot be given to anybody," AIMPLB secretary Zafaryab Jalani told reporters after a meeting of the board in Lucknow.

The board has also categorically stated that it was against taking five-acre land in Ayodhya in lieu of the mosque. The board is of the view that there cannot be any alternative to the mosque," he added.

Earlier in the day, the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind also decided to file a review petition challenging the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict.

Jamiat chief Maulana Arshad Madani said they took the decision following extensive deliberations involving lawyers and experts.

The expert panel observed that the judgment was against the Muslim parties and it was not a final judgment as the option of reviewing it is available under the Constitution of India, the Jamiat said.

The Supreme Court, in its verdict in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi title case on November 9, said the entire 2.77 acres of disputed land should be handed over to the deity Ram Lalla, who was one of the three litigants.

The five-judge Constitution bench also directed the Centre to allot a five-acre plot to the Sunni Waqf Board in Ayodhya to build a mosque.

'No mercy' in Xinjiang
Leaked Chinese govt documents reveal details of its clampdown on Uighurs, other Muslims

after militants from the Uighur minority killed 31 people in a train station in southwestern China, Xi called for an all-out "struggle against terrorism, infiltration and separatism" using the "organs of dictatorship," and showing "absolutely no mercy," according to the daily.

The internment camps expanded rapidly following the appointment in 2016 of a new party chief in Xinjiang, Chen Quanguo.

Chen, according to the Times, distributed Xi's speeches to justify the crackdown and urged officials to "round up everyone who should be rounded up".

Reputed within the party for his handling of minority groups, Chen earlier led iron-fisted policies aimed at crushing dissent in Tibet.

The trove of leaked documents included a guide to answering questions from students who had returned home to Xinjiang to find their families missing or detained in camps.



Bolivia crisis could 'spin out of control': Bachelet

Four more people have died in protests in Bolivia, an international monitor reported Saturday, as the UN rights chief warned that excessive force by police could see unrest "spin out of control". Fierce clashes between security forces and supporters of exiled ex-president Evo Morales have rocked the country since Tuesday, when Senator Jeanine Añez declared herself the country's interim leader. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet said those deaths appeared to have resulted from "disproportionate" force by police and the armed forces.

UK govt, military covered up war crimes: report

The UK government and military covered up credible evidence of war crimes by British soldiers against civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to an investigation by the BBC and the Sunday Times. Leaks from two government-ordered inquiries into the conduct of troops in the conflicts implicated troops in the killing of children and torture of civilians, the investigation found. The allegations include murders by a soldier from the elite SAS unit, as well as deaths in custody, beatings, torture and sexual abuse of detainees by members of the Black Watch infantry unit. Military detectives who unearthed evidence of the alleged war crimes told the BBC that seniors commanders hid it "for political reasons".

Life taking 'toll on my health': Duterte

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has admitted that life is taking "its toll on my health", as speculation swirls over the 74-year-old's prolonged absences from the public eye. Duterte cut short a trip to Japan last month because he was suffering from "unbearable pain" in his spine after a recent motorcycle accident, and has not spoken publicly for two weeks. The accident came just 10 days after he revealed in early October that he has myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakness and can result in drooping eyelids and blurred vision. "If you ask me... 'Are you in the best of health?' Of course not," Duterte told GMA News television in an interview on Friday.

IMPEACHMENT PROBE
Trump aide curbed access to Ukraine call

AFP, Washington

A top US official restricted access to the summary of Donald Trump's Ukraine call that triggered an impeachment probe, fearing it would damage the president, testimony released Saturday showed.

White House Ukraine expert Timothy Morrison told House investigators he knew immediately how sensitive the call was when he heard Trump press Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate former US vice president Joe Biden.

Morrison said in his October 31 deposition that he had asked National Security Council lawyers to review the call because he thought it would be "damaging" if it leaked.

"I recommended to them that we restrict access to the package... that we did not need quite so many people to have access to the package," said Morrison, who left the NSC a day before testifying.

The conversation, which took place on July 25 while the White House was withholding military aid to Ukraine, is central to the House impeachment inquiry into Trump. Democrats leading the probe say the call summary shows the president abused his office by bullying a vulnerable ally into interfering on his behalf in the 2020 US election.

Morrison also broke with other witnesses who have spoken out against the call, telling House investigators he heard nothing wrong.

House investigators also released testimony Saturday from Jennifer Williams, an aide to Vice President Mike Pence, who told lawmakers Trump's push for Ukraine to open investigations was "unusual and inappropriate."



Israeli border police members detain a Palestinian journalist during a protest to show solidarity with his colleague who was shot in his eye, in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran leader backs petrol price hike
Blames enemies for 'sabotage'

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday backed gasoline price increases that have sparked protests across Iran, blaming opponents of the Islamic Republic and foreign enemies for "sabotage", state television reported.

"Some people are no doubt worried by this decision... but sabotage and arson is done by hooligans not our people. The counter-revolution and Iran's enemies have always supported sabotage and breaches of security and continue to do so," Ayatollah Khamenei said, according to state TV.

Riot police and security forces clashed with demonstrators on Saturday in Tehran and dozens of cities across the country, Iranian news agencies and social media said, a day after the government increased the price of gasoline.

Officials said on Saturday that one person was killed in the southeastern city of Sirjan, while social media reports referred to several other deaths as protests turned political.

Internet access in Iran was curbed after the protests at the order of a state security council, the semi-official news agency ISNA reported.

The price of regular gasoline was raised to 15,000 rials (\$0.13) a litre from 10,000 rials and rationed.

US businesswoman says 'heartbroken' by UK PM

AFP, London

A US businesswoman at the centre of controversy over whether Boris Johnson showed her inappropriate favouritism amid an alleged affair yesterday said she had been left "heartbroken" and "humiliated" by the British prime minister.

Jennifer Arcuri, who is accused of getting privileged access to foreign trade jaunts and grants when Johnson was previously London mayor, told Britain's ITV he was treating her like "some fleeting one-night stand".

The technology entrepreneur said the British premier, now campaigning for re-election, had rebuffed her requests "for advice" after the scandal erupted in September.

"I'm terribly heartbroken by the way that you have cast me aside like I am some gremlin," Arcuri, addressing Johnson directly, told ITV's Exposure programme,

according to excerpts given to the Press Association ahead of its broadcast. The show alleges the pair had an affair for more than four years, though Arcuri refused to confirm this.

Johnson, 55, was married at the time of the alleged affair but has since left his wife following a

romance with a former Conservative party spin doctor Carrie Symonds. The pair now live together in Downing Street.

He has previously said he did not have the kind of relationship with Arcuri that required him to notify watchdogs of a potential conflict of interest, as required.

NORTH KOREA PEACE EFFORTS

US, South postpone joint military drills

AFP, Bangkok

The US and South Korea will postpone joint air drills in an "act of goodwill" towards the nuclear-armed North, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday, after months of deadlocked diplomacy with Pyongyang.

North Korea has long protested joint military drills, which it condemns as preparations for invasion, and has set Washington an end-of-year deadline to come up with a new offer in deadlocked negotiations on its weapons programmes.

The US and South Korea last year cancelled several joint drills in the wake of the Singapore summit between President Donald Trump and the North's leader Kim Jong Un, but are due to carry out a combined air exercise later this month.

But the joint air drills set for later this month will now be postponed, Esper said, days after hinting that the option was on the table.

He urged Pyongyang to return to negotiations and "demonstrate the same goodwill as it considers decisions on conducting training, exercises and testing".

Esper said the decision to delay the drills was not a concession but an effort to create "some more space" for diplomats to strike an agreement.