

NEWSIN
brief

6 killed as avalanche
buries Indian patrol

AFP, Srinagar

An avalanche on Monday hit an Indian patrol in the world's highest militarised zone in the Himalayas, killing four soldiers and two porters, an army spokesman said. The disaster was the latest on the Siachen Glacier at more than 5,000 metres (16,500 feet) that is claimed by India and rival Pakistan. Hundreds of troops from both sides have died in avalanches and from the fierce climate in the region over the past three decades.

Three killed in Iran
fuel price unrest

AFP, Tehran

Three security personnel have been killed by "rioters" in Iran, the latest deaths in protests that showed no sign of subsiding yesterday, despite a wave of arrests and an internet shutdown. A shock decision to impose petrol price hikes sparked the nationwide demonstrations in which officials say at least five people have been killed. The United Nations expressed alarm yesterday "that the use of live ammunition has allegedly caused a significant number of deaths across the country".

Israel intercepts 4
rockets from Syria

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's air defences intercepted four rockets fired from neighbouring Syria yesterday, the army said, prompting reported retaliatory missile strikes against the source of the fire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the rockets were fired from positions around the capital held by groups loyal to the Damascus government. It did not elaborate on which group had launched the rockets or whether there had been any casualties in the retaliatory strikes.



A demonstrator hurls stones at Israeli forces during a protest against the demolition of under-construction Palestinian houses by the forces near Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. Inset, Israeli border policemen aim their weapons at the protestors.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US holds 1 lakh in detention

Says UN expert, slams Trump admin for violating int'l law

REUTERS, Geneva

The United States has the world's highest rate of children in detention, including more than 100,000 in immigration-related custody that violates international law, the author of a United Nations study said on Monday.

Worldwide more than 7 million people under age 18 are held in jails and police custody, including 330,000 in immigration detention centres, independent expert Manfred Nowak said.

Children should only be detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest time possible, according to the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.

"The United States is one of the countries with the highest numbers - we still have more than 100,000 children in migration-related detention in the (US)," Nowak told a news briefing.

"Of course separating children, as

was done by the Trump administration, from their parents and even small children at the Mexican-US border is absolutely prohibited by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I would call it inhuman treatment for both the parents and the children."

There was no immediate reaction

MIGRANT CHILDREN

Over 7m children detained worldwide

330,000 are being held for migration-related reasons: report

from US authorities. Novak said US officials had not replied to his questionnaire sent to all countries.

He said the United States had ratified major international treaties such as those guaranteeing civil and political rights and banning torture, but was the only country not to have ratified the pact on the rights of children.

"The way they were separating

infants from families only in order to deter irregular migration from Central America to the United States to me constitutes inhuman treatment, and that is absolutely prohibited by the two treaties," said Nowak, a professor of international law at the University of Vienna.

The United States detains an average of 60 out of every 100,000 children in its justice system or immigration-related custody, Nowak said, the world's highest rate, followed by countries such as Bolivia, Botswana and Sri Lanka.

Mexico, where many Central American migrants have been turned back at the US border, also has high numbers, with 18,000 children in immigration-related detention and 7,000 in prisons, he said.

At least 29,000 children, mainly linked to Islamic State fighters, are held in northern Syria and in Iraq - with French citizens among the biggest group of foreigners, Nowak added.

2010 RAPE ALLEGATION

Swedish prosecutor
drops Assange probe

AFP, Stockholm

Swedish prosecutors said yesterday they have dropped their investigation into WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange over a 2010 rape allegation, even though they found the plaintiff's claim "credible".

"My assessment is that all investigative measures that can be taken have been taken. But... the evidence is not strong enough to file an indictment," deputy director of public prosecutions Eva-Marie Persson told reporters.

The investigation was launched after a Swedish woman who met Assange at a WikiLeaks conference in Stockholm in August 2010 accused the Australian of having unprotected sex with her while she was sleeping. She said she had previously repeatedly refused to have unprotected sex with him.

The statute of limitations in the case was to expire in August 2020.

Assange has always denied the allegation.

"I want to stress that the plaintiff has given a credible and reliable account (of events). Her statement is clear, long and detailed," Persson said in a statement.

"But altogether, my assessment is that the evidence has weakened in such a way that there is no longer reason to continue the investigation."

Assange, 48, has been held at a top-security British prison since April after police dragged him out of the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he had been holed up since 2012 to avoid an extradition order to Sweden. He was subsequently sentenced to 50 weeks in prison for breaching bail conditions when he took refuge in the embassy.



Citizenship bill another
trap like NRC: Mamata

Slams Centre for failing to revive economy

NDTV ONLINE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee lashed out at the BJP government at the Centre on Monday for planning to introduce the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2019 in Parliament and said the proposed legislation is a "trap" like the National Register of Citizen (NRC) to exclude Bengalis and Hindus as legal citizens of the country.

The CAB 2019 is expected to be introduced in the winter session of parliament, which began on Monday.

She also criticised the Centre for failing to revive the Indian economy. Banerjee said the government is only interested in selling out PSUs like Air India instead of taking steps to revive it.

"The Centre is planning to bring in CAB but let me tell you it is just another trap like the NRC. It is a trap to exclude Bengalis

and Hindus from the list of legal citizens and make them refugees in their own countries," she said.

The bill seeks to provide Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and Buddhists from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan after they have stayed in India for seven years even if they do not possess any documents.

"After our government came to power we had taken steps to grant citizenship to refugees of enclaves in Coochbehar district. But we had never imposed any condition that they have to be in this country for six years," Mamata Banerjee said.

The proposed implementation of National Register of Citizens in Bengal has turned into a flash point with the Trinamool Congress government vehemently opposing it. It created a panic among residents in the state after about 19.6 lakh names were omitted from the final list in Assam.



Ailing ex-Pak PM flown by
air ambulance to London

Pakistan's ailing ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday left by air ambulance for London, where he is due to receive medical treatment after battling the government for permission to travel, his doctor and close aides said. Sharif, 69, is suffering from an autoimmune blood disorder, has high blood pressure, and his kidney functions are deteriorating, according to aides. He had been in prison serving a sentence for corruption, but was bailed last month to receive treatment. Since then his party and family have been fighting to get his name removed from a travel stop list to allow him to go overseas for treatment.

UK PM, Labour leader face
off in first election debate



Britain's Boris Johnson and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn were set to go head-to-head yesterday in their first TV debate of the election campaign, facing scrutiny over their plans for Brexit and more public spending. Johnson, who took over as the leader of the governing Conservatives in July, has held a double-digit lead over Labour in opinion polls for weeks, making the December 12 election his to lose. Corbyn meanwhile is seeking to repeat the success of the last election in 2017, when his promise to end austerity and deliver change "for the many, not the few" fired up voters and denied the Tories an outright win.

US urges Sri Lanka's new
leader to respect rights

US called Sri Lanka's new president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, on Monday to ensure human rights and accountability after a campaign in which he vowed to scrap a probe into alleged war crimes. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the United States "stands ready to work" with Rajapaksa, whose brother, a previous president, alarmed Washington by forging close ties with China. "We call on President Rajapaksa to uphold Sri Lanka's commitments to security sector reform, accountability, respect for human rights and non-recurrence of violence," Pompeo said in a statement.

SOURCE: AFP

Taliban swap two Western
hostages for top militants

REUTERS, Peshawar

The Afghan Taliban released American and Australian university professors held hostage for more than three years yesterday, Afghan government officials said, completing a delayed prisoner swap and raising hopes for a revival of peace talks.

American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks were kidnapped in August 2016 from outside the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul where both worked as professors. They were freed in return for the release of three Taliban commanders under a swap that had been long delayed, the officials said.

The US-backed government's decision to carry out the swap is seen as key to securing direct talks with the Islamist militants, who have, until now, refused to engage with what they call an illegitimate "puppet" regime in Kabul.

Talks between the Taliban and the United States aimed at ending their 18-year war collapsed in September after President Donald Trump called off what he described as a planned meeting at his Camp David

presidential retreat.

"The two professors are safely freed and are being taken care of now," said a senior Afghan official on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

He did not provide further details.

Earlier yesterday, three Taliban sources familiar with the deal, including one in Qatar, home to the political leadership of the Afghan Taliban, said the three Taliban commanders who are part of the swap were freed from jail in Afghanistan.

"Soon after their release, they were flown to Doha and handed over to the political office in Qatar," said a Taliban leader in Afghanistan, who declined to be identified because he is not authorised to speak publicly about the deal.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison confirmed the release of weeks.

"We regard this release as one of a series of confidence-building measures that are taking place in Afghanistan," Morrison said in a joint statement with his foreign minister.

Losses run well over \$1b

Says trade body, plans to sue govt for damages

REUTERS, Srinagar

Economic losses in Kashmir have run well over a billion dollars since India revoked its autonomy and statehood in August, the main trade body in the Himalayan region said, adding that it planned to sue the government for damages.

India turned its erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into a federally-controlled territory, tightening control in a shock move it said would rein in militancy in the region also claimed by neighbouring Pakistan, and promote its development.

But the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) said development was elusive, thanks to a protracted shutdown after people closed markets and businesses as a mark of protest, and for fear of reprisals from insurgents.

It estimated economic losses ran into least 100 billion rupees (\$1.40 billion) by September, but now exceeded that, said Nasir Khan, its senior vice president.

"We'll ask the court to appoint an external agency to assess the losses, because it is beyond us," said

Khan, adding that India's telecoms blackout in the region meant the body could not reach business owners by telephone to prepare estimates.

Instead, it had to send staff to meet them and gather details.

India's home ministry and local government officials did not respond to detailed requests for comment.

Besides severing telecoms links ahead of its decision, India imposed curbs on travel and sent thousands of troops to the heavily-militarised region, citing security concerns.

Some curbs have since been eased, but access to the internet remains largely blocked.

India and Pakistan have tussled over Kashmir since independence from Britain in 1947, with each claiming the region in full but ruling it only in part.

For decades, India has battled insurgency in the portion it controls. It blames Pakistan for fuelling the strife, but Pakistan denies this, saying it gives only moral support to non-violent separatists.

The clampdown has hit tourism as well as farming, horticulture and the arts and crafts that contribute the most to its export-oriented economy.

KASHMIR SHUTDOWN



Lebanese anti-government protesters shout slogans in front of a barrier near parliament headquarters in the capital Beirut yesterday. Lebanon's parliament, besieged by protesters, said it had indefinitely postponed a session that had been due to discuss controversial draft laws.

PHOTO: AFP

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT PROBE

Key witnesses appear at
third public hearing

REUTERS, Washington

Four more witnesses were set to appear yesterday in the third public hearing of the House of Representatives impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump including two - Alexander Vindman and Kurt Volker - who previously have offered contrasting testimony behind closed doors.

Vindman, an Army lieutenant colonel and the White House National Security Council's top Ukraine expert, and Volker, the former US special envoy to Ukraine, are scheduled to testify before the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee in the impeachment probe focusing on Trump's dealings with Ukraine.

Testifying alongside Vindman in a morning session is Jennifer Williams, an aide to Vice President Mike Pence. Testifying alongside Volker in an afternoon session is former National Security Council

Russia expert Tim Morrison.

The inquiry focuses on a July 25 phone call in which Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to carry out two investigations that would benefit him politically including one targeting Democratic political rival Joe Biden.

The other involved a debunked conspiracy theory embraced by some Trump allies that Ukraine, not Russia, interfered in the 2016 US election.

In her prepared statement to the committee, Williams said Trump's July 25 call was "unusual" because it "involved discussion of what appeared to be a domestic political matter." Williams said the White House Budget office had said Trump's acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, had directed that \$391 million in security aid to Ukraine be put on hold and that she never learned why the assistance was later released in September.

