

25 migrants rescued from UK-bound truck

AFP, The Hague

A ferry crew found 25 migrants in a refrigerated container on a boat sailing from the Netherlands to Britain on Tuesday, emergency services said. The cargo vessel bound for Felixstowe returned to the Dutch port of Vlaardingen, near Rotterdam, as soon as the stowaways were found, they said in a statement. The discovery comes the month after 39 Vietnamese people were found dead in a refrigerated truck in Britain, again laying bare the risks of illegal migrant routes to Europe.

Three more killed in Bolivia protests

AFP, La Paz

Three protesters were killed and 30 wounded in clashes Tuesday with Bolivian security forces lifting an opposition blockade of fuel supplies to La Paz, the public ombudsman's office reported. Troops and police had moved to lift the siege on a fuel plant in El Alto by supporters of ex-president Evo Morales that has caused acute shortages in nearby La Paz. The deaths brings to 27 the number of people killed since unrest began in the wake of October 20 elections, according to a tally by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Abe becomes Japan's longest-serving PM

AFP, Tokyo

Shinzo Abe entered the history books as Japan's longest-serving premier on Wednesday, but many of his ambitious goals, including a constitutional revision to strengthen the military, appear far from reach. Wednesday marks Abe's 2,887th day in office, topping the record previously set by Taro Katsura, a revered politician who served three times between 1901 and 1913.

UK GENERAL ELECTION

Johnson, Corbyn spar over Brexit in debate

AFP, Manchester

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn traded blows Tuesday over Brexit and the health system as they vied for votes during the first ever head-to-head TV debate.

The prime-time event, held in Manchester and broadcast on ITV, presented an opportunity for a potentially game-changing moment in an election campaign so far characterised as lacklustre.

But neither candidate appeared to land a knockout blow in the first of several planned televised debates, some also involving other smaller parties' leaders, ahead of the December 12 poll.

Frontrunner Johnson, who took over as the leader of the ruling Conservatives in July, relentlessly tried to keep the focus on his plan to finally take the country out of the European Union, reiterating his campaign mantra to "get Brexit done".

"We certainly will come out on January the 31st as we have a deal that is oven-ready," he said, also vowing to complete a future trading relationship with the bloc by 2021.

But in the testiest clashes of the hour-long debate, Corbyn said his rival's timetable was unrealistic and that Johnson was poised to sell out Britain's cherished National Health Service (NHS) in a future trade deal with the United States.

The veteran socialist accused Johnson of holding "a series of secret meetings with the United States in which they were proposing to open up our NHS markets... to American companies".

Johnson responded that the accusations were "an absolute invention".

'That's really the holy grail'

Bill Gates funded secretive energy startup achieves solar breakthrough

CNN ONLINE

A secretive startup backed by Bill Gates has achieved a solar breakthrough aimed at saving the planet.

Heliogen, a clean energy company that emerged from stealth mode on Tuesday, said it has discovered a way to use artificial intelligence and a field of mirrors to reflect so much sunlight that it generates extreme heat above 1,000 degrees Celsius.

Essentially, Heliogen created a solar oven — one capable of reaching temperatures that are roughly a quarter of what you'd find on the surface of the sun.

The breakthrough means that, for the first time, concentrated solar energy can be used to create the extreme heat required to make cement, steel, glass and other industrial processes. In other words, carbon-free sunlight can replace fossil fuels in a heavy carbon-emitting corner of the economy that has been untouched by the clean energy revolution.

"We are rolling out technology that can beat the price of fossil fuels and also not make the CO2 emissions," Bill Gross, Heliogen's founder and CEO, told CNN Business.

"And that's really the holy grail."

Heliogen, which is also backed by billionaire Los Angeles Times owner Patrick Soon-Shiong, believes the patented technology will be able to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from industry. Cement, for example, accounts for 7% of global CO2 emissions, according to the International Energy Agency.

"Bill and the team have truly now harnessed the sun," Soon-Shiong, who also sits on the Heliogen board, told CNN Business. "The potential to humankind is enormous... The potential to business is unfathomable."

Unlike traditional solar power, which uses rooftop panels to capture the energy from the sun, Heliogen is improving on what's known as concentrated solar power. This technology, which uses mirrors to reflect the sun to a single point, is not new.

Concentrated solar has been used in the past to produce electricity and, in some limited fashion, to create heat for industry. It's even used in Oman to provide the power needed to drill for oil. The problem is that in the past concentrated solar couldn't get temperatures hot enough to make cement and steel.



INTERNATIONAL

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2019 GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX

Terrorism spreads even as deaths fall

AFP, Paris

The number of global deaths from terrorism fell 15.2 percent in 2018, even as the number of countries affected by extremist violence continued to grow, the 2019 Global Terrorism Index showed.

From a high of 33,555 deaths in 2014, when the Islamic State (IS) group lured tens of thousands of jihadists to the Middle East, the number of terrorism deaths has more than halved to 15,952 in 2018, the index published by the Sydney-based Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) showed.

The largest declines in 2018 were recorded in Iraq, which proclaimed a military victory over IS the previous year, and Somalia, where US forces have been conducting airstrikes against Shabaab extremists since 2017.

For the first time since 2003, Iraq was not the country worst-hit by terrorism, according to the index which defines terrorism as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation".

Afghanistan, where the Taliban succeeded IS as the world's deadliest terror group, topped the table with 1,443 attacks killing 7,379 people, ahead of Iraq with 1,131 attacks that left 1,054 dead and Nigeria, with 562 attacks that killed 2,040 people.

Syria, which counted 131 incidents that claimed 662 lives, ranked fourth.

In Europe, where no major terror attack was recorded in 2018, the number of deaths fell from over 200 in 2017 to 62.

The report also noted that while "the intensity of terrorism has declined... terrorism is still widespread and increasing."



Indian security personnel detain a member of the Indian youth congress (IYC) during a protest in New Delhi, yesterday. IYC members were protesting against the removal of Special Protection Group (SPG) cover to Congress President Sonia Gandhi and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

PHOTO: AFP

Gotabaya picks brother as PM

Mahinda Rajapaksa set to form cabinet after Wickremesinghe quits

AFP, Colombo

Newly elected Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday named his brother Mahinda as Prime Minister, cementing the grip on power of a clan credited with crushing the Tamil Tigers a decade ago.

Mahinda, a two-term president himself, is due to be sworn in as premier today following the resignation of Ranil Wickremesinghe after his party suffered a humiliating defeat at the weekend's presidential polls.

The Rajapaksa brothers are credited with brutally destroying the Tamil Tigers to end Sri Lanka's decades-long civil war, with the security services they controlled accused of war crimes and multiple human rights abuses.

A spokesman for the new administration said Rajapaksa, 74, will be sworn in by his younger brother Gotabaya, aged 70.

Two other brothers, Basil and Chamal, are also active in politics.

"Prime Minister Rajapaksa will have his cabinet appointed shortly after taking his oath of office," said spokesman Vijayananda Herath.

SRI LANKA ELECTION



formally announced his resignation yesterday clearing the way for the Rajapaksa to form a minority government ahead of possible snap elections early next year.

"Although we enjoy a parliamentary majority, we respect the mandate received by Mr. Rajapaksa and we have

decided to allow him to form a new government," Wickremesinghe said in an address to the nation.

Wickremesinghe, 70, said he informed the new president about quitting, allowing a new minority government to be formed.

The prime minister will have a final meeting with his cabinet as well as other leaders of his coalition before addressing the nation to announce his resignation," his spokesman Sudarshana Gunawardana said earlier in the day.

Wickremesinghe's party put forward Sajith Premadasa in the presidential election but was soundly beaten by Gotabaya in a highly divisive election in the island nation of 21.6 million.

The Rajapaksa, are adored by the Sinhala-Buddhist majority -- but loathed among minority Tamils -- for spearheading the defeat of Tamil separatist militants in 2009 to end the 37-year civil war.

Around 40,000 Tamil civilians were allegedly killed by the military in the closing stages of the conflict when Gotabaya effectively ran the security forces while his brother was president.

Trapped Hong Kong students' sewer escape bid thwarted

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Some anti-government protesters trapped inside a Hong Kong university yesterday tried to flee through the sewers, where one student said she saw snakes, but firemen prevented further escape bids by blocking a manhole into the system.

Reuters witnesses said fewer than 100 protesters remained inside the Polytechnic University, ring-fenced 24 hours a day by riot police, after more than 1,000 were arrested from late on Monday.

Some surrendered while others were held during escape attempts that included trying to clamber down ropes to waiting motorbikes on Monday night, with protesters throwing petrol bombs and police responding with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon. Police said six people were arrested yesterday.

The UN human rights office was watching the university situation with "deepening concern", spokesman Rupert Colville said in Geneva on Tuesday. He called on authorities to seek a peaceful resolution.

The streets were quiet on Tuesday and yesterday.

Demonstrators are angry at what they see as Chinese meddling in freedoms promised to Hong Kong when the then British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. They say they are responding to excessive use of force by police.

Police have made more than 5,000 arrests in connection with the protests since June.

Meanwhile, the US Senate unanimously passed the "Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act", which would require the secretary of state to certify at least once a year that Hong Kong retains enough autonomy to qualify for special US trading consideration and would impose sanctions against officials responsible for rights violations.

China summoned a representative of the US embassy in Beijing over the legislation and demanded that the United States stop meddling, the foreign ministry said.

The Hong Kong government expressed "deep regret" over the bill.



A demonstrator throws stones at a riot police vehicle during a protest against the government, in Santiago on Tuesday. President Sebastian Pinera condemned on Sunday for the first time what he called abuses committed by police in dealing with four weeks of violent unrest that have rocked Chile and which has left 22 people dead and more than 2,000 injured.

PHOTO: AFP

'Wide-scale' Israeli strikes kill 11 fighters in Syria

The Israeli army carried out a "wide-scale" attack against Iranian forces and Syrian army targets in Syria yesterday, killing at least 11 fighters, the Israeli army and a monitoring group said. In a rare confirmation of their operations in Syria, the Israeli army said they carried out dozens of strikes against the Iranian elite Quds Force and the Syrian military, in response to four rockets fired at Israel a day before. At least eleven "fighters" were killed in the strikes, said Britain-based monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). Seven were foreigners, its head Rami Abdel Rahman said, though he could not confirm whether they were all Iranian. Four civilians were also wounded, he added.

Iran's missiles unrivaled in Middle East: Pentagon

Despite decades of sanctions, Iran has succeeded in developing its missile arsenal, which is larger than that of any other Middle Eastern country including Israel, a Pentagon study said Tuesday. "Iran has an extensive missile development program, and the size and sophistication of its missile force continues to grow despite decades of counterproliferation efforts aimed at curbing its advancement," the Defense Intelligence Agency said. Iran has "the largest missile force in the Middle East," the report said. The report said that Iran had developed a series of missiles that could strike at a distance of 1,250 miles (2,000 kilometers) -- capable of reaching Israel or Saudi Arabia.

Hitler birth house in Austria to become police station



The house where Adolf Hitler was born will be turned into a police station, Austria's interior ministry announced Tuesday, after years of legal wrangling as the government looks to prevent the building from becoming a neo-Nazi shrine. The yellow corner house in the northern town of Braunau on the border with Germany, where Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, was taken into government control in 2016. But the destiny of the building was subject to a lengthy legal battle with the family of Gerlinde Pommer, which owned the house for nearly a century. That only ended this year when the country's highest court ruled on the compensation Pommer received. The interior ministry will now invite submissions from architects to have the building house the town's police force.

SOURCE: AFP

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT PROBE HEARING

Followed Trump's orders on Ukraine: US envoy

AFP, Washington

The US ambassador to the European Union yesterday told an impeachment hearing that he was following the orders of President Donald Trump in seeking a "quid pro quo" from Ukraine.

Gordon Sondland -- whose appearance before Congress is being watched especially closely as he was a Trump ally -- said he believed the president was pressuring Ukraine to investigate his potential 2020 rival Joe Biden.

"We followed the president's orders," Sondland said in his prepared testimony to an open hearing of the House Intelligence Committee.

He said that Trump forced US diplomats to work with his personal lawyer, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani.

"We did not want to work with Mr. Giuliani. Simply put, we played the hand we were dealt," he said.

Sondland said that Trump held off on offering a summit with Ukraine's new president, Volodymyr Zelensky, as Giuliani demanded that Kiev publicly announce that it was investigating a gas company on which former vice president Biden's son Hunter held a paid board position.

Giuliani also wanted Zelensky to investigate a widely discredited conspiracy theory in which Ukraine planted evidence on a server of Biden's Democratic Party to show that Russia interfered in the 2016 election.

"Mr. Giuliani's requests were a quid pro quo for arranging a White House visit for President Zelensky," Sondland said.

Sondland said he "never received a clear answer" on why US suspended security aid to Ukraine, which is battling Russian-backed separatists, but that he "came to believe" it was also tied to the probes sought by Trump.