

NEWSIN brief

3 more protesters die in Iraq clashes

Three anti-government protesters were killed in clashes with security forces on bridges across the Tigris in the Iraqi capital yesterday, a medical source said. More than 340 people have died and thousands have been wounded since rallies against widespread graft and unemployment erupted in Baghdad and the mostly-Shia south last month. Two of them were shot dead and the third died from trauma injuries from a tear gas canister. Another 30 protesters were wounded.

US backs Indian role in Afghanistan

Nancy Izzo Jackson, a US State Department official in charge of Afghanistan, said Thursday that it supported continued Indian involvement in Afghanistan, even as President Donald Trump looks to withdraw troops. India is one of the most enthusiastic backers of Afghanistan's government, contributing more than \$3 billion since the 2001 US-led invasion toppled the Taliban, who harbored virulently anti-Indian militants.

Rebel fire kills 7 Aleppo civilians

Rebel rocket fire on the government-controlled northern Syrian city of Aleppo on Thursday killed seven civilians and wounded 30, state television said. 30 civilians were also wounded in the attack. A salvo of rockets slammed into five districts of the city including Salaheddin, state media said adding 30 civilians were also wounded. Government forces retook Aleppo at the end of 2016 after an offensive against rebels, but the city still sees sporadic attacks by Islamist factions.



Riot police stand in between pro-China supporters (C) as they shout slogans and gesture towards office workers (not pictured) gathering in support of pro-democracy protesters during a lunch break rally in the Central district of Hong Kong, yesterday. At least eight protesters who had been holding out at a trashed Hong Kong university surrendered yesterday, while others searched for escape routes past riot police who surrounded the campus but said there was no deadline for ending the standoff.

'Not afraid' to fight back

Warns Xi, says China still wants to reach an accord

China wants to reach an initial trade deal with the United States, President Xi Jinping said yesterday, but is "not afraid" to fight back when necessary and will enact economic reforms at its own pace. It is rare for Xi to speak so directly about the trade war, and his comments come two days after US President Donald Trump complained that Beijing had not made sufficient concessions so far, making him reluctant to conclude a bargain. The world's two biggest economies have been locked in a bruising trade conflict for more than a year, hitting each other with volleys of tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of goods. "As we always said we don't want to start the trade war but we are not afraid," Xi told former US officials and other foreign dignitaries at a meeting at Beijing's Great Hall of the People. "When necessary we will fight back but we have been working actively to try not to have a trade war," he told the group, which included former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, former US treasury secretary Henry Paulson and Trump's former economic adviser Gary Cohn.

Trump on October 11 announced a "phase one" deal resolving important US grievances about Chinese trade and currency practices. But the two sides have yet to ink the deal. China has insisted on a rollback of existing tariffs, which Trump said he has not agreed to. American officials want large purchases of US farm exports.

US Congress approval this week of legislation supporting pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong has also cast a shadow on the negotiations. "We want to work for a phase-one agreement on the basis of mutual respect and equality," Xi told the foreign visitors, who were in town for the Bloomberg New Economy Forum. The Chinese leader said the trade talks "may affect the future prospects of the world economy" and China holds a "positive attitude". Xi renewed China's pledge to further reform and open up its economy, but he warned it has been "very cautious and rigorous" in doing so. "We cannot afford any fundamental or drastic mistake. If a giant ship like China capsizes it cannot be turned over," he said.

US-CHINA TRADE ROW

Trump complains China has not made sufficient concessions so far

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US will expose Iran's 'abuses'

Says Pompeo as Tehran claims 'world war' against it failed

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged Iranians on Thursday to send photos and other information documenting repression amid ongoing protests, while vowing to sanction "abuses" by the Islamic republic. Demonstrations erupted in sanctions-hit Iran last Friday, hours after the price of gasoline spiked by as much as 200 percent. Unrest spread to scores of urban centers, during which protesters attacked police stations, torched petrol pumps and looted shops. "I have asked the Iranian protestors to send us their videos, photos and information documenting the regime's crackdown on protestors," Pompeo tweeted. "The US will expose and sanction the abuses," he added. A near-total internet shutdown has made obtaining information on bloodshed difficult. Officials have confirmed five deaths, but Amnesty International has said the real death toll could be well over 100. Meanwhile, Iran's Basij militia said the unrest sparked by fuel price hikes amounted to a "world war" against Tehran that was thwarted, pointing the finger of blame at Washington, Riyadh and Israel. The United Nations human rights office, for its part, has said it was alarmed by reports that live ammunition used by security forces to quell the unrest had caused a "significant number of deaths". Internet remained mostly blocked in Iran yesterday for a sixth day, with officials and news agencies saying the blackout was gradually being rolled back.

4 IN 5 ADOLESCENTS DON'T EXERCISE ENOUGH: WHO

Four in five adolescents worldwide do not get enough physical activity, to the detriment of their health, the World Health Organization said yesterday, warning that girls especially need more exercise. In its first ever report on global trends for adolescent physical activity, the UN health agency stressed that urgent action was needed to get teens off their screens and moving more. "We absolutely need to do more or we will be looking at a very bleak health picture for these adolescents," study co-author Leanne Riley told journalists. The report, which was published in the Lancet Child & Adolescent Health journal, is based on data from surveys conducted between 2001 and 2016 of some 1.6 million students between the ages of 11 and 17 across 146 countries. It found that 81 percent did not meet the WHO recommendation of at least an hour a day of physical activity such as walking, playing, riding a bike or taking part in organised sports. This is worrying, since regular physical activity provides a host of health benefits, from improved heart and respiratory fitness to better cognitive function, making learning easier. Exercise is also seen as an important tool in efforts to stem the global obesity epidemic. But despite ambitious global targets for increasing physical activity, the study found virtually no change over the 15-year-period it covered. While the report does not specifically study the reasons for adolescent physical inactivity, she suggested that the "electronic revolution... seems to have changed adolescents' movement patterns and encourages them to sit more, to be less active." The report authors also pointed to poor infrastructure and insecurity making it difficult for adolescents to walk or bike to school. The study found that levels of physical inactivity among adolescents were persistently high across all regions and all countries, ranging from 66 percent in Bangladesh to 94 percent in South Korea. And the situation was particularly concerning for girls, with only 15 percent of them worldwide getting the prescribed amount of physical activity, compared to 22 percent for boys. SOURCE: AFP



Pope, in Thailand, cautions youth against tech pitfalls

Pope Francis warned against the potential pitfalls of technology and the competition for young people's "attention" yesterday, dedicating the final full day of his Thailand trip to engaging the next generation of Catholics. "Rapid technological advancements can open up immense possibilities that make life easier, but can also result in the growth of consumerism and materialism," the Pope cautioned. There are fewer than 400,000 Catholics in Thailand which make up just over 0.5 percent of the population. The Pope has called for religious harmony and peace throughout his four-day Thai tour, a message he will likely carry today to Japan where he will visit the sites of the world's only nuclear attacks.

Lanka president to call snap parliamentary polls in March

Sri Lanka's new president yesterday said that he will call a snap parliamentary election in March following his sweeping victory at the weekend. Gotabaya Rajapaksa is hoping to ride a wave of popularity by calling an election six months before the current parliament's five-year term expires on March 1. "I will consult the people at the earliest opportunity I get under the constitution," he said, after swearing-in a new cabinet headed by his brother Mahinda, a former president who will now serve as premier and finance minister. Currently the Rajapaksa and their allies have just 96 lawmakers in the 225-seat parliament, making it hard for them to pass legislation.

IED casualties: 3,800 killed or hurt last year, says report

Nearly 3,800 people were killed or injured around the world last year by improvised mines used by armed groups, marking the highest number of such casualties on record, campaigners said Thursday. Monitors of compliance with the Mine Ban Treaty said that government use of landmines has all but halted, but warned that surging numbers of casualties linked to armed groups' use of improvised devices was marred by the overall success of the 20-year disarmament charter. Myanmar, which is not party to the treaty, was the only country where government forces used antipersonnel mines over the past year. SOURCE: AFP

Monsanto pleads guilty to illegal pesticide use

Biotech giant Monsanto on Thursday agreed to plead guilty to illegally using a banned and highly toxic pesticide on research crops at one of its facilities on the Hawaiian island of Maui and to pay \$10 million in fines. The company admitted in court documents filed in US District Court in Honolulu that it sprayed the pesticide known as PennCap-M on corn seed and other crops at its Valley Farm facility in 2014, even though it knew the chemical had been banned by the Environmental Protection Agency the year before. "The illegal conduct in this case posed a threat to the environment, surrounding communities and Monsanto workers," said Nick Hanna, the United States Attorney for the Central District of California, whose office handled the case. "Federal laws and regulations impose a clear duty on every user of regulated and dangerous chemicals to ensure the products are safely stored, transported and used." The case against Monsanto was brought as the agriculture giant faced a slew of lawsuits arguing that its Roundup weed killer causes cancer. Federal prosecutors had initially sought to file felony charges against the company for illegally spraying PennCap-M, a nerve agent. But they reportedly agreed to let the company plead to a lesser misdemeanor offense after Monsanto's lawyers intervened at the highest levels of the Department of Justice. In its guilty plea, Monsanto admitted that after the 2014 spraying, it told employees to enter the sprayed fields a week later. The plea calls for Monsanto to pay a \$6 million criminal fine and \$4 million in community service payments to Hawaiian government entities.



Activists of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) shout slogans during a protest against the government's Citizenship Amendment Bill proposal to provide citizenship or stay rights to minority communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan in India, in Guwahati, Assam, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'This is my sacrifice' for Iraq

16-year-old makes case for protest as thousands maimed

A fractured spine, paralysed leg, hole in the back: Hamza took to the streets of Iraq's capital to demand a better life but now he has even less than ever. "This is my sacrifice for Iraq," said the 16-year-old, his strained voice barely audible over the phone in Baghdad. "If I could walk, I would be back in the protests now." Hamza is one of at least 3,000 people who have been maimed in Baghdad and southern Iraq since anti-government protests erupted on October 1, according to the NGO Iraqi Alliance for Disabilities Organisation (IADO). The staggering number is the latest burden for a country already struggling with one of the highest disability rates in the world, according to the United Nations. After decades of back-to-back conflicts, Iraq is in the thick of its largest and deadliest grassroots protest movement, with more than 300 people dead and 15,000 wounded. To disperse protesters, security forces have used tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, live rounds and even machine-gun fire -- all of which can seriously maim or even kill, as Hamza learned.

On November 4, the teenager was among around 20 protesters wounded by live fire in Baghdad. A bullet pierced Hamza's stomach and exited through his back, leaving a gaping hole. Two others hit his legs. By the time he arrived at a nearby hospital, he had lost litres of blood and his heart was failing, said his father, Abu Layth. Doctors revived the boy with a defibrillator, injected him with four units of blood and rushed him into surgery. "He was basically dead. The doctors brought him back to life," he said. It is not clear when the teenager will stand on his feet again. Iraq has a long history of bloody conflict, from the 1980-1988 war with its neighbour Iran to the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and fight against the Islamic State group. Each war has killed more Iraqis impaired for life. The government's Central Statistical Organisation says that in the wake of decades of conflict, more than two million of Iraq's 40-million population are disabled people entitled to state support. But IADO and other rights groups say the real number sits at more than three million -- and counting.



S Korea salvages military pact with Japan at 11th hr

South Korea yesterday decided against scrapping a critical military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, in a dramatic 11th-hour U-turn that will come as a relief to the United States. The pact was due to expire at midnight amid a sharp deterioration in ties between the two democracies and market economies that has alarmed Washington as it seeks to curb the threat from nuclear-armed North Korea. But after a flurry of last-ditch diplomacy, Seoul announced it would "conditionally" suspend the expiry of the agreement with just six hours left on the clock. Kim You-geun, a national security official at Seoul's presidential Blue House, confirmed the accord, known as GSOMIA, would not be allowed to lapse at midnight. "The Japanese government has expressed their understanding," he said. However, he warned that the pact could still "be terminated at any time." Officials are now scrambling to arrange bilateral talks between Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha on the sidelines of a meeting of G20 foreign ministers in Nagoya. Seoul and Tokyo are both major US allies but their relationship is heavily coloured by territorial and historical disputes stemming from Japan's bitterly-resented 35-year colonial rule over the peninsula, including the use of wartime sex slaves and forced labour. The GSOMIA pact, signed in 2016, enabled the two US allies to share military secrets, particularly over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile capacity.