

NEWS IN brief

Congress okays new polls without Morales

AFP, La Paz
Bolivia's Congress approved a bill Saturday that opens the door to new elections without ex-president Evo Morales, as the caretaker government met with protesters to end weeks of unrest. At least 32 people have been killed in violence that erupted after a disputed election on October 20, with protesters' blockades causing severe fuel and food shortages in La Paz and other cities.

Dozens of migrants rescued off Italy

AFP, Rome
Italian coast guards on Saturday said they had rescued 143 migrants off the island of Lampedusa although around 20 others were apparently missing according to the survivors. "The crews of four patrols rescued 143 people who had fallen into the sea" from a ten-metre boat, the coast guard said in a statement. Survivors said that around 20 of those who had been on the boat were missing. The nationality of the migrants are not released.

UK cops charge man over lorry tragedy

AFP, London
A 23-year-old Irish man has been charged with human trafficking offences in connection with the deaths of 39 Vietnamese nationals whose bodies were found in a refrigeration truck in Britain on October 23. Christopher Kennedy is due to appear at a court in Essex on Monday, police said. He has been charged with conspiracy to arrange or facilitate the travel of people with a view to exploitation, and conspiracy to facilitate the commission of a breach of British immigration law. Kennedy was arrested early Friday on the M40 motorway.



A person carries another across a flooded arcade in Venice yesterday during a high tide "Acqua Alta" meteorological phenomenon. Flood-hit Venice was bracing for another, though smaller, high tide, after Italy declared on November 15 a state of emergency for the Unesco city where perilous deluges have caused millions of euros worth of damage.

PHOTO: AFP



Never had desire to enter politics: Modi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said he never had the desire to enter politics but he now tries to put in his best efforts to serve the people. "I never had the desire to enter politics, but now that I am a part of it I give my best on how to work for the people," Modi said during his Mann Ki Baat radio programme while interacting with a group of National Cadet Corps cadets. Answering a question, Modi said he loves books. "I used to read books. But these days I am unable to read and due to Google, the habit of reading has deteriorated because if you want to seek a reference, then you immediately find a shortcut. As is the case with everyone, certain habits of mine have also been spoilt," he said. Modi said he had little interest in watching films and added that he seldom watches TV.

Bloomberg enters 2020 race

Michael Bloomberg officially announced his late-entry Democratic presidential bid yesterday, unveiling a campaign that the former New York mayor said will be squarely aimed at defeating President Donald Trump. Bloomberg, in a letter explaining his candidacy on his campaign website, lays out a more moderate vision for the country and casts himself as "a doer and a problem solver -- not a talker." "I'm running for president to defeat Donald Trump and rebuild America. We cannot afford four more years of President Trump's reckless and unethical actions," Bloomberg wrote. Bloomberg's late 2020 bid -- along with the money the billionaire can spend to fund his campaign -- injects a new level of uncertainty into the race less than three months before the first voting in the race begins. In the last several days there was little doubt he was running.

Malaysia's last Sumatran rhinoceros dies



The last Sumatran rhinoceros in Malaysia died on Saturday, leaving the smallest species of rhino, which once roamed across Asia, surviving in small numbers mostly in Indonesia. The 25-year-old female rhino, named Iman, who has been cared for in a wildlife reserve since her capture in 2014, died of cancer in the state of Sabah on the island of Borneo. The Sumatran rhino was declared extinct in the wild in Malaysia in 2015. Malaysia's last male Sumatran rhino died in May this year. The species has now almost disappeared from the wild, and conservationists estimate that only about 30 to 80 Sumatran rhinos survive, mostly on the Indonesian island of Sumatra and on the Indonesian side of Borneo.

SOURCE: AFP, CNN, NDTV

Six more Iraqis killed

Dozens hurt in clashes with security forces

AFP, Nasiriyah

Six protesters were killed in Iraq's south yesterday, where resurging anti-government demonstrations turned up the heat on paralysed politicians facing the country's largest grassroots movement in decades.

Three demonstrators were killed and around 50 wounded in clashes with security forces near the southern port of Umm Qasr, the Iraqi Human Rights Commission reported.

An AFP correspondent said security forces had fired live rounds at protesters trying to block access to the port.

Since October 1, Iraq's capital and majority-Shia south have been swept by mass demonstrations over corruption, lack of jobs and poor services that have escalated into calls for an overhaul of the ruling system.

Top leaders have publicly acknowledged the demands as legitimate and promised measures to appease protesters, including hiring drives, electoral reform and a cabinet reshuffle.

But the rallies have continued, waning on

some days but swelling when demonstrators felt politicians were stalling.

Yesterday, protesters in the southern city of Nasiriyah blockaded five main bridges, shut down schools and burned tyres outside public offices in anger.

They blocked access to oil fields and companies around the city, torching as well its Shia endowment centre, a government body that manages religious sites.

Medical sources said overnight three protesters had been shot dead and at least 47 others wounded by security forces in the city, some 300 kilometres (200 miles) south of the capital Baghdad.

An estimated 350 people have been killed and thousands wounded since October 1, according to a tally compiled by AFP as authorities are not providing precise or updated figures.

That makes the protests Iraq's deadliest grassroots movement in decades, but also its most widespread.

The rural south has carried the torch of the movement for weeks, with students and teachers leading rallies outside schools and public offices.

UNREST OVER GRAFT, UNEMPLOYMENT



Plane crash kills 23 at DR Congo city

Airline blames 'technical problem'

AFP, Goma

Twenty-three bodies were recovered yesterday after a small plane crashed on take-off into a densely populated area of the city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, rescue workers said.

"We are up to 23 bodies now," Goma rescue service coordinator Joseph Makundi told AFP.

The dead are believed to include all those on board the plane as well as people on the ground.

Images from the scene showed plumes of black smoke and flames apparently from the burning plane as locals looked on.

Rescue workers were also seen combing through the plane's burned-out fuselage.

The Dornier-228 aircraft had been headed for the city of Beni, 350 kilometres north of Goma when it went down in a residential area near the airport in the east of the country.

"There were 17 passengers on board and two crew members. It took off around 9-9.10 am (0700 GMT)," Busy Bee airline staff member Heritier Said Mamadou said.

Busy Bee, a recently established company, has three planes serving routes in the North Kivu province.

One of the company's maintenance workers at the site quoted by news site actualite.cd blamed a "technical problem".

The precise number of casualties on the plane and on the ground was not yet known.

Pope urges abolition of nuclear weapons at Japan's ground zeros

REUTERS, Hiroshima

Pope Francis brought his campaign to abolish nuclear weapons to the only two cities ever hit by atomic bombs yesterday, calling their possession indefensibly perverse and immoral and their use a crime against mankind and nature.

Francis visited the ground zeros of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both seared in the world's collective consciousness after the bombs dropped there by the United States three days apart in August 1945 in an effort to end World War Two.

"Here, in an incandescent burst of lightning and fire, so many men and women, so many dreams and hopes, disappeared, leaving behind only shadows and silence," Francis said at Hiroshima's Peace Memorial after standing in silent prayer and listening to a harrowing account by a survivor.

Yoshiko Kajimoto, who was 14 at the time, recalled "people walking side by side like ghosts, people whose whole body was so burnt that I could not tell the difference between men and women, their

hair standing on end, their faces swollen to double size, their lips hanging loose, with both hands held out with burnt skin hanging from them. No one in this world can imagine such a scene of hell," she said.

More than 100,000 people died instantly in the attacks and about 400,000 others died in subsequent months, years and decades of radiation sickness or illnesses.

"The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, so too the possession of nuclear weapons is immoral, as I already said two years ago," the pope said in Hiroshima.

Earlier in Nagasaki, Pope issued direct denunciations and demands. Resources spent on the "arms race" should be used for development and protection of the environment, Francis said in Nagasaki.

"In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons, are an affront crying out to heaven," he said.



A protester uses a megaphone during a demonstration against all kinds of violence towards women in central Brussels, Belgium, yesterday. Cities around the world today will mark the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women with rallies and call for equality.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UK PM vows Brexit in manifesto

AFP, Telford

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday unveiled his Conservative Party's manifesto, pledging to move on from Brexit and austerity in a bid to secure a general election majority.

Having taken over a minority administration in July and been unable to speed his EU divorce deal through parliament, Johnson is seeking a clear victory at the December 12 snap election.

"We're now, as you know, less than three weeks away from the most critical election in modern memory," said Johnson as he unveiled the manifesto in Telford, west central England.

"The choice has never been starker. Get Brexit done and we can restore confidence and certainty to businesses and families.

Social media 'the greatest propaganda machine in history'

CNN ONLINE

Speaking at the Anti Defamation League's International Leadership summit on Thursday night, where the British comedian and actor was accepting an award, the actor and comedian criticized social media -- especially Facebook (FB), Twitter (TWTR), and YouTube -- as "the greatest propaganda machine in history."

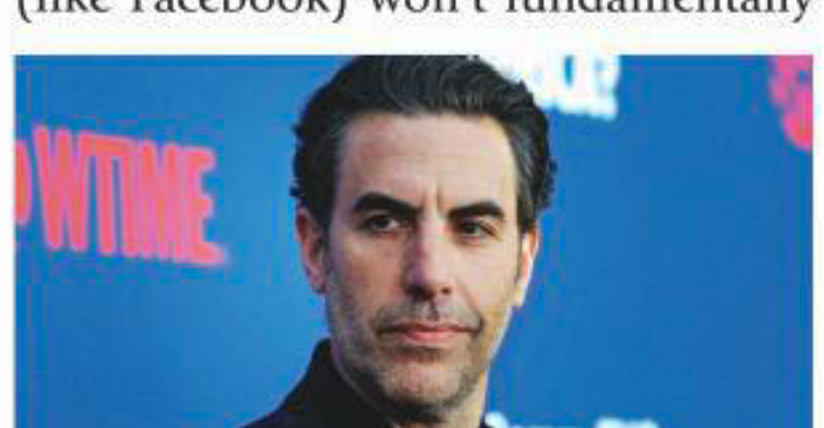
Baron Cohen blamed the tech companies for stoking the fires of bigotry and enabling the spread of dangerous conspiracies, often fueled by algorithms designed to keep consumers hooked.

"Today around the world, demagogues appeal to our worst instincts," Baron Cohen said. "Conspiracy theories once confined to the fringe are going mainstream."

He added, "We have lost, it seems, a shared sense of the basic facts upon which democracy depends."

He called for a fundamental reevaluation of how social media "spreads hate, conspiracies and lies," pointing to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's recent speech warning against laws and regulations targeting companies like his.

"The truth is, these social companies (like Facebook) won't fundamentally



change because their entire business model relies on generating more engagement, and nothing generates more engagement than lies, fear and outrage," he added. Zuckerberg was not the only tech leader to fall under Baron Cohen's

critical eye. He also spoke about Google's Sundar Pichai, Google (GOOG) co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey.

"The Silicon Six—all billionaires, all Americans—who care more about boosting their share price than about protecting democracy," he said.

"This is ideological imperialism—six unelected individuals in Silicon Valley imposing their vision on the rest of the world, unaccountable to any government and acting like they're above the reach of law."

He concluded his speech with a suggestion to prioritise truth, empathy and tolerance over lies, prejudice and indifference.

"Then maybe, just maybe, we can stop the greatest propaganda machine in history, we can save democracy, we can still have a place for free speech and free expression, and, most importantly, my jokes will still work."

US Navy defies Trump

Proceeds in its effort to expel elite SEAL commando after war crimes accusation

AFP, Washington

The US Navy will proceed in its effort to oust a member of its elite SEAL commando unit, an official said Saturday, defying the wishes of President Donald Trump.

Edward Gallagher had been accused of war crimes in a high-profile case but was found guilty only of a lesser offense. On November 15, Trump reversed the demotion handed down to the 40-year-old under his conviction.

The Navy this week launched a procedure under which a peer review board could strip him and three other members of his unit of their Trident pins -- effectively booting them from the SEALs.

A rankled Trump declared on Twitter on Thursday that "The Navy will NOT be taking away Warfighter and Navy Seal Eddie Gallagher's Trident Pin."

On Saturday, however, a senior Pentagon official who requested anonymity in order to speak freely said the "peer review board is proceeding."

Whether Gallagher can remain in the unit or not will be determined by a panel of Navy SEAL officers that is set to convene in December.

The move came as multiple US news outlets reported that Navy Secretary Richard Spencer had threatened to resign over the affair, a claim he sharply denied.

"Contrary to popular belief, I am still here. I did not threaten to resign," Spencer said, speaking at a forum in Halifax, Canada.

The US Navy chief said he did not consider Trump's tweet to be a formal order. "I need a formal order to act," Spencer told reporters on the sidelines of the forum.

According to the US Constitution, the president is the commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces.

Gallagher, a 15-year Navy SEAL, had been accused in the stabbing death of a wounded Islamic State prisoner in Iraq in 2017, attempted murder of other civilians and obstruction of justice.



Get Brexit done and we can focus our hearts and our minds on the priorities of the British people. It is time to unleash the potential of the whole country and to forge a new Britain."

Johnson sees Britain's third general election in four-and-a-half years as the only way to break the Brexit logjam.

Having got the Brexit date delayed three months from October 31 to January 31, opposition parties backed his call for an early general election.

Johnson is promising to bring back his Brexit deal to parliament before December 25 if the centre-right Conservatives are returned to power.