

NEWSIN  
brief

Lanka airports on alert after cop flees

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan government has put airports on alert to stop police detectives leaving without permission after a top officer who had reportedly received death threats fled the island, police said Tuesday. The alleged threats against inspector Nishantha Silva came after the November 16 election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was also under investigation by him. Police said the names of 704 Criminal Investigation Division (CID) officers had been sent to immigration authorities.

Mali chopper collision kills 13 French troops

AFP, Paris

Thirteen French soldiers were killed in Mali when two helicopters collided while fighting insurgents in the country's restive north, officials said yesterday, the heaviest single loss for the French military in nearly four decades. The accident occurred late Monday while the helicopters were reinforcing ground troops pursuing the insurgents in the Liptako region, near the borders of Burkina Faso and Niger, the armed forces ministry said.

4 dead in anti-UN protests in DR Congo

AFP, Beni

At least four protesters were killed in eastern DR Congo on Monday, the military said, after angry clashes erupted over the perceived failure of UN peacekeepers to stop deadly militia attacks. Crowds defied warning shots fired by Congolese forces and stormed a UN camp, which had apparently been evacuated, after rioting broke out in the eastern town of Beni. The violence was prompted by the killing overnight of eight people in Beni, the latest attack blamed on the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia.



Emergency workers clear debris at a site where a building collapsed in Thumane, 34 kilometres northwest of capital Tirana, after an earthquake hit Albania yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

6.4 quake kills 13 in Albania

Search on for victims trapped under toppled buildings

AFP, Durrës

Albanian rescuers were digging through rubble as desperate survivors trapped in toppled buildings cried out for help yesterday after the strongest earthquake in decades claimed at least 13 lives.

The 6.4 magnitude quake struck at 3:54 am local time, with an epicentre 34 kilometres northwest of the capital Tirana in the Adriatic Sea, according to the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre. The quake was followed by several aftershocks, including one of 5.3 magnitude.

A total of 13 people have now been found dead, according to the defence ministry, while around 38 people have been rescued alive. The health ministry meanwhile said that more than 600 people received first aid in hospitals.

The worst damage was in and around the coastal city of Durrës, a tourism destination on the Adriatic, where soldiers, police and civilian forces were working to reach those believed to be trapped inside buildings that were reduced to dust.

The European Commission said on Twitter that "rescue teams from Italy, Greece and Romania are already on their way" to assist the rescue efforts.

Albania is known for its chaotic urban planning, particularly in coastal spots popular with tourists where many buildings have been constructed without proper permits and safety regulations.

Yesterday's quake was the strongest to hit the Durrës region since 1926, seismologist Rapo Ormeni told local television.

'Presidents are not kings'

Court says White House must comply with impeachment subpoenas

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's top aides must comply with subpoenas to appear in the impeachment investigation against the president, a US appeals court judge ruled.

In a case involving former White House counsel Don McGahn, who was subpoenaed in May by the House Judiciary Committee, judge Ketanji Jackson ruled Monday that administration officials cannot claim absolute immunity from testifying based on their closeness to the US leader.

While Jackson ruled specifically on McGahn's case, she said it had broad application to all current and former presidential aides.

"Presidents are not kings," Jackson wrote in her decision. "No one, not even the head of the Executive branch, is above the law."

She said Congress has the power to subpoena any of the president's advisors, whether they are involved in domestic policies or sensitive national security issues.

That ruling could open a path for the House Intelligence Committee -- which is building a case for impeachment charges against Trump -- to force testimony from three top witnesses: former national security advisor John Bolton, White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

All are believed to have direct knowledge of Trump's

alleged demand that Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky open investigations into Trump's Democratic rival Joe Biden in exchange for a high profile summit and much-needed military aid.

The ruling could also give fresh life to the stalled impeachment case in the Judiciary Committee, which has tried to develop charges against Trump for obstructing the Russian collusion investigation led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Mueller's final report in April outlined 10 acts of alleged obstruction by the president.

"Don McGahn is a central witness to allegations that President Trump obstructed Special Counsel Mueller's investigation," Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler said in a statement.

"The administration's claim that officials can claim 'absolute immunity' from Congressional subpoenas has no basis in law, as the court recognized today."

But testimony won't happen right away, as the Justice Department plans to appeal Jackson's decision, said department spokesperson Kerri Kupec.

That could take the case to the Supreme Court, and in the meantime, the department could seek a court stay to prevent McGahn or others from speaking before the two committees.



AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's unpopular leader Carrie Lam yesterday acknowledged that public dissatisfaction with her government fuelled a landslide win by pro-democracy candidates in local elections, but she drew fresh criticism by offering no new concessions to resolve months of violent protests.

In China, state media sought to downplay and discredit the weekend ballot that delivered a stinging rebuke to the financial hub's pro-Beijing establishment.

Lam admitted that the district council election result revealed public concern over "deficiencies in the government, including unhappiness with the time taken to deal with" the unrest.

In a shock result, candidates opposing control by China seized an overwhelming majority of 452 elected seats in the city's 18 district councils, bodies historically dominated by a Beijing-aligned establishment. It was a humiliating rebuke to Beijing and Lam, who has dismissed calls for political reform and repeatedly



suggested that a silent majority supported her administration.

Since the polls, pro-democracy politicians have stepped up calls for Lam to meet key demands such as direct popular elections for the city's leadership and legislature, and a probe into alleged police brutality against demonstrators.

But in her weekly press briefing, Lam sidestepped those calls, instead denouncing street violence and repeating earlier pledges to step up a cross-party dialogue on the root causes of the turmoil, proposals previously dismissed by her opponents as inadequate.

The electoral drubbing has revived speculation that Lam might be dumped by Beijing, but a Chinese government spokesman reiterated support for her.

Meanwhile, China has summoned the US ambassador to demand that the United States scrap legislation backing Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, or "bear all the consequences", the foreign ministry said yesterday.

'Don't want to get between superpowers'

New Sri Lanka president says he wants to work closely with both India and China

NDTV ONLINE

Sri Lanka will work with India and it won't do anything that will harm its interests, newly elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has said ahead of his visit to New Delhi later this week.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who is considered pro-China, said he wanted Sri Lanka to be a "neutral country" and work with all the countries.

"We will work with India as a friendly country and won't do anything that will harm India's interests," said Rajapaksa, who will travel to New Delhi on November 29 on his first official trip abroad as Sri Lankan president.

"We want to be a neutral country," Rajapaksa, who was sworn in as Sri Lanka's president

last week, told Nitin Gokhale of BharatShakti.in and Strategic News International in an interview.

"We don't want to get in between the power struggles of superpowers... We are so small and we can't survive to get into this balancing acts," he said.

Rajapaksa said he wanted to work very closely with both India and China.

Noting that the Indian Ocean is an important place and plays an important role in the present day geopolitics, he said Sri Lanka will ensure all business lanes open.

Rajapaksa also said that giving away the Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease was a mistake by the previous government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena.

"The deal has to be renegotiated," he said.



Iraq protesters burn tires to block a street during ongoing anti-government protests in Najaf, Iraq, yesterday. A protester was shot dead yesterday in the Iraqi capital and dozens more were wounded across the country's south. At least 350 people have been killed and around 15,000 wounded since the protests broke out on October 1 over rampant corruption in the country and rising unemployment.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Three US men exonerated after 36 years in prison

Three Baltimore men who spent 36 years in prison were exonerated on Monday of the 1983 murder of a teenage boy who was shot dead over a jacket. Alfred Chestnut, Andrew Stewart and Ransom Watkins were serving life sentences for the shooting of DeWitt Duckett, a 14-year-old student at Harlem Park Junior High School in West Baltimore. "These three men were convicted, as children, because of police and prosecutorial misconduct," Baltimore state's attorney Marilyn Mosby said after the three were formally exonerated by a city circuit court judge and released from prison. "What the state, my office, did to them is wrong," Mosby said. "They deserve so much more than an apology. We owe them real compensation -- and I plan to fight for it."

Dead deer found with 7kg of plastic in stomach

A wild deer was found dead after swallowing 7 kilograms (15 pounds) of plastic bags and other trash in Thailand, an official said yesterday, raising the alarm on waste littering the country's waters and forests. The Southeast Asian country is one of the world's largest consumers of plastic, with Thais using up to 3,000 single-use plastic bags each per year, whether for wrapping street food, takeaway coffee or packing groceries. The bags contained coffee grounds, instant noodle packaging, garbage bags, towels and also underwear, according to photos provided by the national park.

UK Labour launches special manifesto on race



The UK's main opposition Labour Party yesterday unveiled a special manifesto on race and faith, proposing that children be taught about colonialism, injustice and the British empire. The left-wing party's pre-election proposals are aimed at reducing the "significant inequalities in employment, education and representation in public life" faced by ethnic minority and faith-based communities. Labour is proposing to create an emancipation educational trust "to ensure historical injustice, colonialism and role of the British empire is taught in the National Curriculum". It is also planning to launch reviews into the under-representation of minority ethnic teachers and into far-right extremism, if it wins the December 12 snap general election. The party unveiled its main political manifesto on Thursday.

SOURCE: AFP

'ILLEGAL' REFUGEES IN WEST BENGAL

Politics hots up over NRC, CAB

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The politics in West Bengal over controversial National Register of Citizens has once again beginning to hot up.

In a bid to blunt Prime Minister Narendra Modi government's move to introduce a pan-India NRC, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday announced that attempts would be made to regularise all refugee colonies of up to three acres irrespective of who owns the land. Those living in these colonies would be given land rights.

Mamata told reporters after a meeting of her cabinet that "we have decided to regularise all the refugee settlements simply because it has been a long time now -- nearly 48 years. Since (March) 1971, they have been left living without a home or land. I believe refugees have the right."

According to Mamata, more than 13,000 and 12,000 families living on

land owned by the state and central governments respectively would benefit from the decision.

On the other hand, Bharatiya Janata Party national secretary Rahul Sinha accused Mamata Banerjee of



"misleading" people and appeasing her party's vote bank.

"First of all, the state government has no power or jurisdiction to transfer central government land to anyone. Second, it is trying to win over the refugees by making such announcements as it knows that once

the central government brings in the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, the refugees will eventually get land rights. Third, our definition of refugees does not match with that of Trinamool Congress. They are including infiltrators under the category of refugees but we don't include infiltrators as refugees," he said.

The Modi government plans to introduce the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), which seeks to give citizenship for non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who were subjected religious persecution in those countries and took shelter in India, in the ongoing winter session of parliament.

Mamata has sought to tap apprehensions among large Hindu refugees in West Bengal in the wake of the exclusion of 12 lakh Hindus from the NRC in Assam three months ago. The BJP considers Hindus as its vote bank.

BJP forced out of power in Maharashtra state

AFP, Mumbai

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party was forced out of power yesterday in Maharashtra state, home to the country's financial capital Mumbai, following the collapse of its short-lived coalition.

Hard-fought state elections last month saw Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) win the largest share of seats but not enough to form a government on its own, prompting weeks of haggling that culminated in the imposition of presidential rule on Maharashtra two weeks ago.

The BJP managed to eke out a surprise agreement with a top leader from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Saturday, but victory was fleeting, after other NCP leaders denounced the deal, leading to its dissolution.

BJP lawmaker Devendra Fadnavis resigned as chief minister yesterday, telling reporters that the party could not form a government.

Although the BJP had previously governed the country's richest state in a coalition with its right-wing regional ally Shiv Sena, the alliance broke up after the October election due to a power-sharing dispute.

Shiv Sena and its ideological rivals, the centre-left Indian National Congress, and the NCP are expected to stake a joint claim to form a government instead.

"The fact that these parties, which have so little in common, are coming together just to keep the BJP out -- this has very dangerous implications for Modi and his party," said Dhaval Kulkarni, author of a book on Shiv Sena.