

NEWSIN  
brief

Albania quake death toll hits 49

AFP, Tirana

Forty-nine people died and more than 5,000 have been displaced by the violent earthquake that pulverised homes in Albania this week, the Prime Minister said in a tally of the damage yesterday. The 6.4 magnitude quake that jolted Albania before dawn on Tuesday was the most deadly and destructive in decades. Whole families were crushed by their homes while they were sleeping.

Small plane crash kills 7 in Canada

AFP, Toronto

Five Americans and two Canadians were killed when a light aircraft crashed in a wooded area on the north shore of Lake Ontario, Canada's transport safety agency said Thursday. The US-registered single-engine Piper PA-32 departed Toronto's Buttonville Airport and was apparently headed to Quebec City when it crashed on approach to the Kingston, Ontario airport on Wednesday just after five pm (2200 GMT).

Erdogan slams 'brain dead' Macron

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday lashed out at counterpart Emmanuel Macron over his criticisms of Nato, saying it was the French president who was suffering "brain death". Macron has strongly opposed Turkey's military offensive against Kurdish militants in Syria, launched last month, and reiterated on Thursday that it "endangers the actions of the anti-IS (Islamic State) coalition, of which Nato is a member". Erdogan said Ankara had a right to intervene in Syria given their shared border.



An Iraqi man mourns his brother during a funeral procession for the anti-government demonstrators killed during protests a day earlier, in the central holy shrine city of Najaf, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PM announces resignation

15 more killed in Nasiriyah as death toll crosses 400

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's embattled premier yesterday announced he would resign in keeping with the wishes of the country's top cleric, as renewed violence added to a soaring death toll in two months of anti-government protests.

Adel Abdel Mahdi's written statement was greeted with cheers and blaring music across Baghdad's iconic Tahrir Square, where demonstrators have massed since early October against a ruling class deemed corrupt and in hock to foreign powers.

"I will submit to the esteemed parliament a formal letter requesting my resignation from the premiership," Abdel Mahdi wrote, just hours after Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani used his weekly sermon to urge parliament to replace the cabinet.

Abdel Mahdi would be the first prime minister to step down since Iraq became a parliamentary system following the US-led ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"It's our first victory, and we're hoping for many more," shouted one demonstrator in Tahrir, as patriotic tunes blasted from the motorised rickshaws used to ferry casualties from the square.

Nearby, protesters occupying a gutted 18-storey building that has become a symbol of the uprising could be seen

dancing and pumping their fists in the air.

But despite their joy, many said the premier's resignation did not go far enough.

"We won't leave the square until every last one of those corrupt people resigns," said another demonstrator in a black shirt.

The grassroots movement is the largest Iraq has seen in decades, but also the deadliest, with more than 400 people dead and 15,000 wounded in Baghdad and the Shia-majority south, according to an AFP tally.

The toll continued to rise yesterday, with 15 protesters shot dead in the flashpoint city of Nasiriyah and another killed in the Shiite shrine city of Najaf.

The previous day had been one of the bloodiest yet, with 44 demonstrators killed and nearly 1,000 wounded in Baghdad and across the south.

That came after protesters stormed the Iranian consulate in Najaf late Wednesday, accusing the neighbouring country of propping up Iraq's government.

Since October 1, Baghdad and the south have been rocked by the most widespread street unrest in decades, demanding an overhaul of the ruling elite and reforms to root out corruption, end unemployment and improve infrastructure.

VIOLENT PROTESTS IN IRAQ



Japanese restaurants rocket to top of best in world list

Two Japanese restaurants have shot to the top of the La Liste ranking of best places to eat in the world, with a third one getting the second highest mark from the authoritative "guide of guides". Yosuke Suga's tiny Tokyo restaurant Sugalabo, which has only 20 tables, does not have a Michelin star but shares the top spot on the French-based list alongside the reigning leaders, Guy Savoy in Paris and New York's Le Bernardin under Eric Ripert. The famously innovative Ryugin restaurant in the Japanese capital run by chef Seiji Yamamoto jumped 30 places to reach the shared number one spot. Kyoto's Kitcho Arashiyama was one of seven restaurants split second place.

Suu Kyi fans join VIP tours for Rohingya genocide trial

Ardent fans of Aung San Suu Kyi are snapping up spots on \$2,000 tours to The Hague, in a display of moral support as Myanmar faces charges of genocide over the Rohingya crisis at the UN's top court in December. Suu Kyi would personally represent Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where the once-lauded democracy champion will be defending the 2017 military crackdown against the Rohingya minority. One travel operator is organising a five-day tour to The Hague that includes visa and transportation as part of a \$2,150 package. 20 or so people have so far signed up for the trip. West African nation Gambia will open its case at the ICJ on December 10 on behalf of the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Visiting Lanka PM gets \$400m loan in India



India will lend Sri Lanka \$400 million for infrastructure projects, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday after talks with the island nation's new President Gotabaya Rajapaksa aimed at improving bilateral ties. Sri Lanka, located off the southern tip of India, has become an arena of competing influence between New Delhi and China. Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's former wartime defence chief, is on his first visit to India after a sweeping election victory earlier this month. Modi said India would provide Sri Lanka with \$50 million for its security needs in addition to the \$400 million for infrastructure.

SOURCE: AFP



PHOTO: AFP

Local residents walk through foamy discharge, caused by pollutants, at a beach in Chennai, yesterday. The residents near the beach at Tamil Nadu's Adyar Estuary were in for a shock yesterday, when the sea water began to froth as it reached the shore.

Demos and deals as Black Friday frenzy grips Europe

AFP, Paris

Climate activists staged protests across Europe yesterday to denounce the environmental toll of mass consumption, while shoppers hit the streets and the internet as retailers of all stripes touted pre-holiday bargains.

The American "Black Friday" tradition of a post-Thanksgiving day of deals has taken hold in Europe as a long weekend of sales, alarming critics who say it encourages unbridled and wasteful spending.

This year, activists have targeted the climate costs of frenzied shopping, in particular from delivering the millions of items ordered from Amazon and other online retailers.

French NGOs had pledged a "Black Day for Amazon," with protesters blocking a distribution centre outside Paris on Thursday, and others near Lyon and Lille yesterday.

The Extinction Rebellion campaign group posted on Twitter images of protesters being forcibly removed by police from the Lyon site.

"Amazon today emits as much greenhouse gases as a country," Jean-Francois Julliard, head of Greenpeace France, said at a sit-in at Amazon's headquarters just north of Paris yesterday.

Activists formed human chains to prevent shoppers from entering stores at La Defense business district west of Paris as well as in the central city of Saint-Etienne and the town of Roanne.

In Strasbourg, activists plastered storefronts with anti-consumerist messages such as "Black Friday: A bad deal for the environment" and poured glue into door locks, delaying the opening of dozens of stores.

Sylvain Truc, a member of Youth for Climate protesting in Marseille, called Black Friday "the symbol of what we're trying to fight."

Despite the protests, many retailers across Europe reported brisk Black Friday business.

TRUMP'S SURPRISE AFGHANISTAN VISIT

Taliban 'ready to resume talks'

REUTERS, Kabul

The Taliban yesterday said they were ready to restart peace talks with the United States, a day after President Donald Trump visited US troops in Afghanistan and said he believed the radical group would agree to a ceasefire.

Trump's surprise Thanksgiving Day visit was his first to Afghanistan since becoming president and came a week after a prisoner swap between Washington and Kabul that raised hopes for a long elusive peace deal to end the 18-year war.

"The Taliban wants to make a deal and we are meeting with them," Trump told reporters after arriving in Afghanistan on Thursday.

"We say it has to be a ceasefire and they didn't want to do a ceasefire and now they want to do a ceasefire, I believe. It will probably work out that way," he said.

Trump cancelled peace negotiations in September after the militant group claimed responsibility for an attack in Kabul that killed 12 people, including an American soldier. Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the hardline Islamist insurgent group, yesterday said they were "ready to restart the talks".

"Our stance is still the same. If peace talks start, it will be resumed from the stage where it had stopped," Mujahid

Please keep out of UK election

UK PM tells Donald Trump

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was best if US President Donald Trump did not get involved in Britain's upcoming election when he visits London for a Nato summit next week.

"What we don't do traditionally as loving allies and friends, what we don't do traditionally, is get involved in each other's election campaigns," said Johnson, whose Conservative Party has a commanding lead in the polls ahead of the Dec 12.

"The best (thing) when you have close friends and allies like the U.S. and the UK is for neither side to get involved in each other's election," he told LBC radio.

Trump has already waded into the election, saying in October left-wing opposition leader Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, would be "so bad" for Britain and that Johnson should do a pact with Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage.

Corbyn has used Trump's praise of Johnson as one of his focal messages to attack the Conservatives in his campaign, saying they would sell off parts of the much-loved state-run National Health Service to the US businesses after Brexit if they win the election.

The Sun newspaper reported on Friday that senior Conservative Party figures feared he could say something during his two-day visit that upsets their campaign.

Trump, who is due to arrive in London on Dec 2, is likely to be asked about his attitude to future trade talks and whether the NHS should be included, having previously said everything should be on the table.

However, Johnson said he would walk out of trade negotiations if including the health service was a pre-condition.

Sudan to dissolve Bashir party, 'dismantle' regime

Repeals harsh law used to regulate women's behavior

REUTERS, Khartoum

Sudanese transitional authorities approved a law on Thursday to dissolve the former ruling party and repealed a public order law used to regulate women's behaviour under ex-president Omar al-Bashir, the justice minister said.

The two measures responded to key demands by a protest movement that helped overthrow Bashir in April.

Their implementation will be a crucial test of how far transitional authorities are willing or able to go to overturn nearly three decades of rule by Bashir, who took power in a 1989 coup and whose Islamist movement penetrated deep into Sudan's institutions.

The law to dissolve Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) also allows for the party's assets to be seized, Justice Minister Nasredeen Abdelbari said. State TV described it as a measure to "dismantle" the former regime.

The Sudanese Professionals Association

(SPA), which spearheaded the protests against Bashir, welcomed the law.

"It is an important step on the path to building a democratic civilian state," the group said in a statement.

Under Bashir, the public order law was deployed to impose conservative Islamic social codes, restricting women's freedom of dress, movement, association, work and study.

This could include preventing women from wearing trousers or leaving their hair uncovered in public, or mixing with men other than their husbands or an immediate relative.

Those found to have contravened the law could be punished with flogging.

Women played a prominent role in months of protests against Bashir.

Women's rights activist Hadia Hasaballah said the repeal of the law showed the failure of Islamist ideology.

"The decision to abolish the public order law is a culmination of the courageous struggles of women for 30 years," she told Reuters. "Women martyrs deserve it."



HK police end university siege

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police yesterday ended their two-week siege of a university campus that became a battleground with pro-democracy protesters, as activists vowed to hold fresh rallies and strikes in the coming days.

Renewed calls to hit the streets came after Beijing and city leader Carrie Lam refused further political concessions despite a landslide victory for pro-democracy parties in local elections last weekend.

Sunday's district council polls delivered a stinging rebuke to the financial hub's pro-Beijing establishment and undermined their argument that a silent majority were tired of the nearly six months of increasingly violent protests.

They also ushered in a rare period of calm following weeks of spiralling unrest, with no clashes or tear gas battles between protesters and police for more than a week.

But the calm spell looks set to end as public anger grows once more over the lack of response to the election results by Beijing and Hong Kong's leaders.

Online forums used to organise the mass movement have filled with calls for a major rally on Sunday and a strike on Monday targeting the morning commute.

The Sunday rally has received permission from authorities, but the fresh calls raise the spectre of a return to the kind of weekly political chaos that has battered Hong Kong for nearly six months and helped tip the city into recession.

