

NEWSIN brief

Saudi Arabia takes over G20 presidency
AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia became the first Arab nation yesterday to take over the G20 presidency as it seeks to bounce back onto the world stage following global uproar over its human rights record. The G20 presidency, which Saudi Arabia takes over from Japan, will see it host world leaders for a global summit in its capital next November 21-22.

Bus plunges onto river in Russia; 19 killed
AFP, Moscow

A passenger bus plunged off a bridge onto a frozen river in Siberia yesterday, killing 19 of the more than 40 people on board, authorities said. A tyre on the bus burst as it was crossing the bridge over the Kuenga river in eastern Siberia's Zabaikalsky region. The vehicle, which was travelling from Sretensk to Chita, skidded off the road and onto the ice. Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious incidents, said it had opened a criminal inquiry into a possible violation of traffic safety rules.

Mexico shootout leaves 14 dead
AFP, Mexico City

A shootout in a Mexican town near the US border between suspected drug traffickers and police left at least 14 dead, including four officers, officials said Saturday. The confrontation broke out shortly before noon in Villa Union in the northern state of Coahuila when officers detected several vehicles and heavily armed passengers touring the small community, which is roughly 60 kilometres from the US border. Four of those killed were police, seven were suspected criminals and another three unidentified bodies were found nearby on a rural road.



Students and social workers hold placards during a protest seeking justice for the rape of a 26-year-old veterinary from Hyderabad, in Amritsar, yesterday. Hundreds of people on Saturday laid siege to a police station where four men are being held over the latest gruesome rape-murder to shock India.

REGIME CLASHES WITH MILITANTS

69 dead in Syria's Idlib in two days

Two days of clashes between regime forces and armed groups in Syria's last major opposition bastion have killed nearly 70 on both sides, undermining a months-long ceasefire agreement, a war monitor said yesterday.

The battles in the northwestern province of Idlib are "the most violent" there since a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement went into effect in late August, said Rami Abdul Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Residents of affected villages fled north to escape the fighting, adding to the hundreds of thousands who have already flooded out of the province's violence-plagued south since fighting escalated earlier this year.

"I don't want to see my children trapped under rubble," said one of those driven from his home, Hafez, who escaped the flashpoint area along with his wife and three kids two days earlier.

Yesterday morning, clouds of smoke rose over the Maaret al-Numan region as warplanes pounded jihadists and allied rebels in positions they had recently recaptured from regime forces, said an AFP correspondent.

The Britain-based Observatory yesterday put the death toll from fighting at 69 combatants since battles started the previous day.

At least 36 regime forces were among those killed.

The Observatory said an attack led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate on several regime positions had initially sparked the fighting.

Overnight, the Syrian army backed by Russian warplanes launched a counter-push to reclaim territory it had lost in the battles, the war monitor said.

ROW OVER RELEASE OF TERRORISTS

Johnson, Corbyn differ after London bridge knife attack

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday he would strengthen prison sentences, vowing to boost security after an attack in the British capital by a man convicted of terrorism who was released early from prison.

With less than two weeks before Britain heads to the polls, law and order has raced to the top of the election agenda after Usman Khan, wearing a fake suicide vest and wielding knives, killed two people on Friday before being shot dead by police.

Johnson's Conservatives have long championed tough police and prison measures, but opposition parties have criticised the governing party for overseeing almost a decade of cuts to public services.

Trying to distance himself from those cuts, Johnson said if he won the December 12 election he would invest more money in the prison system and make sentences tougher.

"We are going to bring in tougher sentences for serious sexual and violent offenders and for terrorists," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr show.

"I absolutely deplore the fact that this man was out on the street, I think it was absolutely repulsive and we are going to take action."

He was keen to portray his rival for prime minister, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, as being weak on crime, blaming the opposition party for bringing in a law that automatically released some prisoners early when it was in government.

Corbyn said he believed convicted terrorists should "not necessarily" serve their full prison terms, suggesting it would depend on the nature of their sentence and also how they had behaved in prison.

Despite criticising cases where police and the army were accused of operating a shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland, the Labour leader said the police had no choice but to shoot the attacker dead.

Johnson blames opposition party for bringing in a law that released prisoners early

Corbyn believes terrorists should not necessarily serve their full prison terms

Humanity's 'war against nature' must stop

UN chief warns ahead of UN climate conference in Madrid

AFP, Madrid

The devastating impact of global warming that threatens humanity is a pushback from Nature under assault, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned yesterday ahead of a key climate conference.

"For many decades the human species has been at war with the planet, and now the planet is fighting back," he said, decrying the "utterly inadequate" efforts of the world's major economies to curb carbon pollution.

"We must stop our war against nature, and science tells us we can do it."

"Climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent, more deadly, more destructive," he said on the eve of the 196-nation COP25 climate change talks in Madrid.

Every year, air pollution associated with climate change kills seven million people, he noted, adding that human health and food security are at risk.

The UN chief's comments were clearly aimed at the handful of countries responsible for more than half of global greenhouse gas emissions, though he did not call them out by name.

President Donald Trump has set Union as playing a constructive role, saying the 28-nation bloc could help lead the way towards a net-zero global economy by 2050.

The Paris Agreement calls for capping global warming at under two degrees Celsius, and 1.5C if feasible. But current national pledges -- if carried out -- would see global temperatures rise by at least 3C, a recipe for human misery, according to scientists.

Despite growing public pressure, the 12-day negotiating session is likely to remain technical in nature, focused on finalising the "rulebook" for the Paris Agreement, which becomes operation at the end of next year.

Climate change is no longer a long-term problem, Guterres said.

"We are confronted now with a global climate crisis and the point of no return is no longer over the horizon -- it is in sight and hurtling towards us."



Violence returns to HK

Cops fire tear gas as thousands take to the streets; protesters thank Trump

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Police fired tear gas to disperse thousands of anti-government protesters in Hong Kong yesterday, ending a rare lull in violence, as residents took to the streets chanting "revolution of our time" and "liberate Hong Kong".

The protest in the busy shopping district of Tsim Sha Tsui followed a march by hundreds of people to the US consulate to show "gratitude" for US support for the demonstrations that have agitated the Chinese-ruled city for six months.

Shops and businesses in the area closed early as police sprayed volleys of tear gas at protesters, including some elderly residents and others with their pets, as they marched past the city's Kowloon waterfront, home to luxury hotels and shopping malls.

Police made several arrests as the tear gas sent hundreds fleeing towards the harbour.

Hong Kong, a major financial hub, had enjoyed relative calm for the past week since local elections last Sunday delivered an overwhelming victory to pro-democracy candidates.

Activists pledged, however, to maintain the momentum of the anti-government movement. Protests in the former British colony since June have at times forced the closure of government offices, businesses, schools and even the international airport.

Waving posters that read "Never forget why you started" and black flags with the logo "Revolution now", protesters occupied several main roads yesterday, with young residents and families with children filling the nearby streets.

By Sunday night, the crowds of protesters had diminished and some roads reopened to traffic.



A woman holds a sign during the "Lest We Forget" rally in Kowloon in Hong Kong, yesterday.

'Dangerous for all nations'

Mikhail Gorbachev warns Russia, US must avoid 'hot war'

CNN ONLINE

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev may be remembered today as the man who presided over the collapse of an empire: The recent anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 saw major celebrations to mark the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany.

Less well remembered was a meeting that followed just a few weeks later between Gorbachev and US President George HW Bush off the Mediterranean island of Malta, where the two leaders tried to come to grips with how quickly history had changed.

"Look at how nervous we are," Gorbachev told Bush, according to a Soviet transcript.

"We were shocked by the swiftness of the changes that unfolded," Bush said.

Thirty years later, some of the top issues discussed at the Malta summit still carry particular resonance -- arms control, Afghanistan and the difficulty building trust between Moscow and Washington.

On the day CNN sat down with Gorbachev in Moscow, President Trump paid a surprise visit to US troops in Afghanistan, where he these clashes, when the leading, largest countries in this conflict become ever more involved, they are dangerous for all nations."

The fall of the Berlin Wall was preceded by another pivotal moment: The signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987.

Asked about the demise of the treaty that he signed alongside US President Ronald Reagan, Gorbachev expressed a hope that such arms control agreements could be revived.

"All the agreements that are there are preserved and not destroyed," he said. "But these are the first steps towards destruction of [that which] must not be destroyed in any case. Therefore, if this path goes further, then everything is possible. This must not be allowed."

Gorbachev expressed hope that it would be possible for Washington and Moscow to find a way to prevent a "hot war" in the future.



Iraqi parliament accepts PM Mahadi's resignation

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's parliament approved the resignation of the embattled cabinet yesterday, after two months of violent unrest that have left more than 420 people dead and thousands mourning them in nationwide marches.

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi said Friday he would submit his resignation to parliament following a spike in the death toll among protesters who accuse the entire ruling elite of being inept, corrupt and beholden to foreign powers.

The demonstrations spread from their epicentre in Baghdad and the mostly Shia south to the northern, majority-Sunni city of Mosul, where hundreds of students dressed in black organised a mourning march for fallen activists.

Parliament opened its session yesterday afternoon and within minutes had approved Mahdi's resignation, which according to the constitution renders him and the entire cabinet a "caretaker government."

The speaker of parliament said he would now ask President Barham Saleh to name a new prime minister.

Just before the session began, another protester was shot dead in the capital, medical sources said.

The protest movement is Iraq's biggest since the US-led invasion of 2003 toppled Saddam Hussein and installed a democratic system in the oil-rich but poverty-plagued nation.

The demonstrators have vented their anger at neighbouring Iran, which is seen to wield huge influence in Iraq, with protesters last week burning down an Iranian consulate.

"Abdel Mahdi should leave, so should parliament and the parties, and Iran," said a young demonstrator on Baghdad's Tahrir (Liberation) Square.



DiCaprio denies link to Amazon fires accusation

American actor Leonardo DiCaprio on Saturday denied a claim by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro that he had helped fund groups allegedly linked to fires in the Amazon rain forest.

"While worthy of support," the 45-year-old DiCaprio said in a statement on his Instagram account, "we did not fund the organizations targeted." In his weekly broadcast Thursday, Bolsonaro accused DiCaprio of "collaborating with the fires in the Amazon" by donating \$500,000 to a group he said had started fires in the ecologically sensitive forest in order to attract donations. While citing no evidence, Bolsonaro said that DiCaprio had earmarked a part of the \$500,000 "for the people who were setting fires."

Israel planning new Jewish settlement in Hebron

Israel's new hard-right defence minister yesterday ordered officials to start planning a new Jewish settlement in the heart of the divided West Bank city of Hebron. The Defence Ministry said Bennett had instructed departments responsible for the Israeli occupied West Bank "to notify the Hebron municipality of planning a new Jewish neighbourhood in the wholesale market complex". The market area is on Hebron's once-bustling Shuhada Street, which leads to a holy site where the biblical Abraham is believed to have been buried. The street is now largely closed off to Palestinians, who have long demanded that it be reopened. The city is holy to both Muslims and Jews and is a flashpoint for clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers.

No sign of terror motive in Hague stabbings: police

Dutch police said yesterday they had found no indications of a terrorist motive after arresting a homeless man for stabbing three teenagers in The Hague. The 35-year-old man was detained on Saturday after the assault, which happened as shoppers hunted Black Friday bargains in the city's main commercial street. "The precise circumstances of the stabbing incident are still unclear. No indications have yet been found to show that there was a terrorist motive," police said on Twitter. "The motive for the stabbing incident is still being investigated." Police said the suspect had no fixed abode and was "arrested at a homeless shelter in the centre of The Hague" before being taken to a police station for questioning.

SOURCE: AFP