

NEWSIN
brief

Fire at Sudan tile
factory kills 23

AFP, Khartoum

Twenty-three people were killed and dozens injured as a fire triggered by an explosion in a gas tanker tore through a tile manufacturing factory in the Sudanese capital on Tuesday, officials said. India's embassy in Khartoum said reports indicated the factory employed over 50 Indian nationals. Its nationals were among the casualties, the embassy said on its website, without giving figures. Preliminary reports from the scene indicate that necessary safety equipment was missing at the site, it said.

Germany kicks out
Russian diplomats

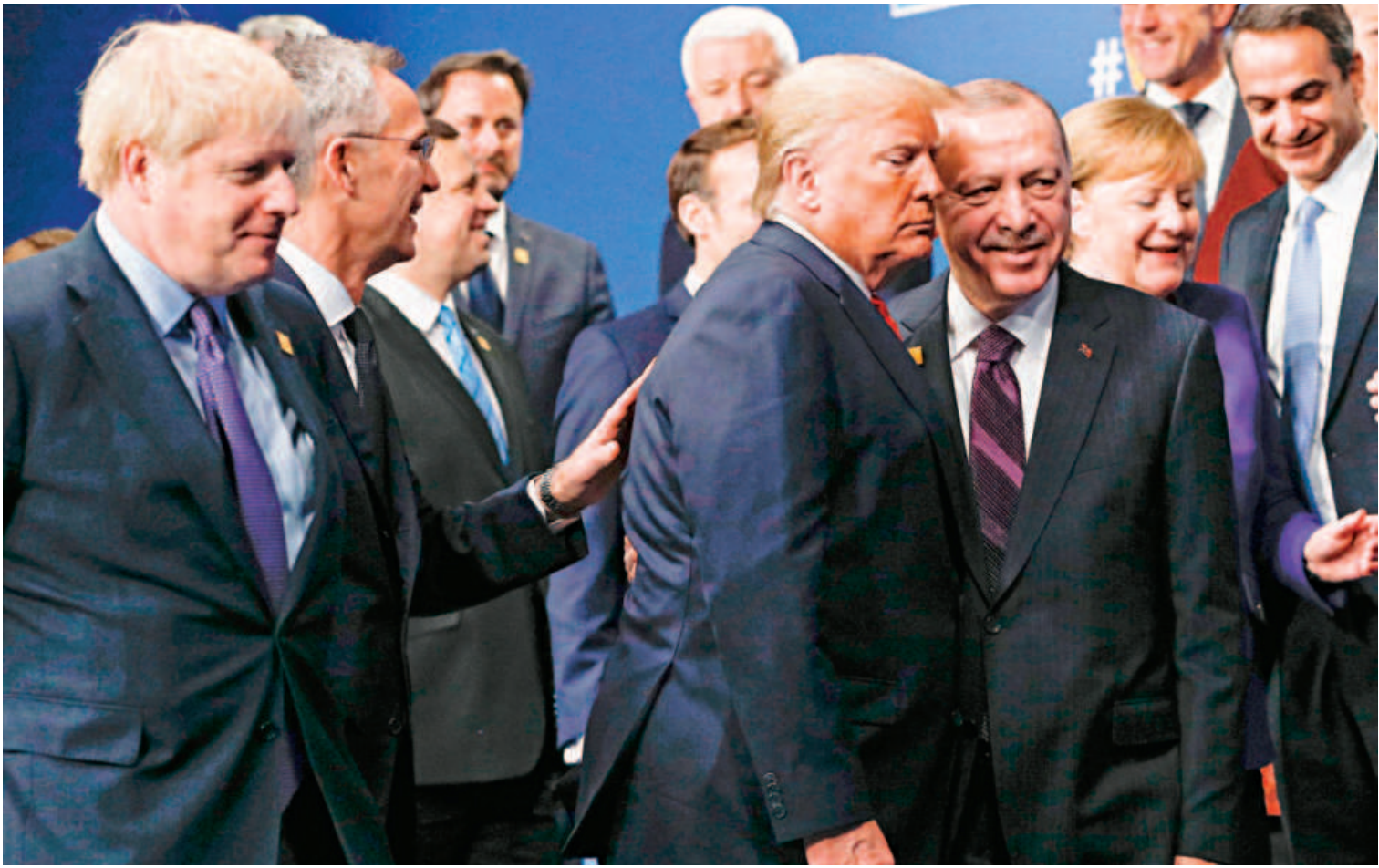
AFP, Berlin

Germany expelled two Russian diplomats yesterday after prosecutors said Moscow could be behind the killing of a former Chechen rebel commander in a Berlin park. Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a 40-year-old Georgian national, was shot twice in the head at close range in Kleiner Tiergarten park on August 23, allegedly by a Russian man who was arrested shortly afterwards. Russia has pledged "retaliatory measures" after the expulsion.

EU to miss 2020
green goals

AFP, Copenhagen

The EU will not meet its environmental targets for 2020 but could achieve those for 2030 and 2050 if urgent action is taken, the European Environment Agency (EEA) said Wednesday. "While most of the 2020 targets will not be achieved, especially those on biodiversity, there is still a chance to meet the longer-term goals and objectives for 2030 and 2050," the EEA said in a report published during the COP25 summit that opened in Madrid on Monday.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (L), US President Donald Trump (C), German Chancellor Angela Merkel (2R), Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) and other Nato leaders leave the stage after the family photo to head to the plenary session at the Nato summit at the Grove hotel in Watford, northeast of London, yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Nato leaders pledge
unity against terror

Recognise challenge of rising China

AFP, Watford

Nato leaders yesterday vowed to stick together against threats from Russia and terrorism and recognised the challenge of a rising China, despite another summit overshadowed by US President Donald Trump's angry outbursts.

The 29 leaders meeting outside London to mark the 70th anniversary of the Atlantic alliance agreed a joint statement despite divides over spending and strategy and sharp exchanges between several of the heads of state.

But the bad blood continued to the end of the two-day get together, with Trump branding Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "two-faced" after a group of allied leaders were caught on video at a Buckingham Palace reception mocking the US leaders' rambling press appearances.

Trump cancelled his planned final news conference to fly directly back to Washington, despite boasting of having convinced his European allies to boost defence spending and Turkey to drop its objections to the adoption of an updated defence plan for the Baltic states and Poland.

The second and final day of the get together began with the release of a video showing Trudeau, France's President Emmanuel Macron, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the Netherlands' Mark Rutte joking together about how Trump had delayed the previous days meetings.

Trump criticised the Canadian leader for not meeting Nato members' target of spending two percent of their GDP on defence.

"Well, he's two-faced," he said.

Only nine of Nato's 29 members have reached the target agreed at its 2014 summit to spend two percent of their GDP on defence before 2024.

Trump abused presidency

Says House impeachment report; US lawmakers to consider drawing up formal charges against president

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump solicited foreign interference to boost his re-election chances, undermined national security and ordered an "unprecedented" campaign to obstruct Congress, Democrats said on Tuesday in a report that lawmakers will use as the basis of any formal impeachment charges.

In the 300-page report, Democrats leading the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee levelled allegations of sweeping abuse of power by Trump, saying he used US military aid and the prospect of a White House visit to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to undertake investigations that would benefit Trump politically.

Trump's spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham dismissed both the report and Schiff's investigation. "At the end of a one-sided sham process, Chairman Schiff and the Democrats utterly failed to produce any evidence of wrongdoing by President Trump," she said in a statement.

Behind closed doors, the Democratic-led panel voted 13 to

9 on Tuesday, along strict party lines as expected, to officially adopt and issue the report to the committee, reported AFP.

The heart of the impeachment probe is whether Trump misused the power of his office to pressure Ukraine to investigate the son of former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the 2020 election.

White House dismissed the report and slammed the House Democrats

In the report, Democrats detail accusations that Trump obstructed probe



The public release of the report is a milestone in a weeks-long investigation into whether Trump should be removed from office over his dealings on Ukraine, reported Reuters.

It summarizes hours of private testimony and televised hearings in which former government officials described a months-long effort to pressure Ukraine to

carry out the investigations sought by Trump in July.

The report's completions hands the process over to the House Judiciary Committee, which will now be responsible for drafting actual articles of impeachment should lawmakers decide to move forward. Lawmakers were set to start debating whether to draw up articles of impeachment against Trump yesterday.

'Price must be paid'

China warns US over Uighur bill, raising doubts over early trade deal

REUTERS, Beijing

China warned yesterday that US legislation calling for a tougher response to Beijing's treatment of its Uighur Muslim minority will affect bilateral cooperation, clouding prospects for a near-term deal to end a trade war.

Expectations of a quick deal had receded already, after US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that it might take until late 2020 to reach agreement.

Approval by the US House of Representatives of the Uighur Act of 2019, which still requires passage by the Republican-controlled Senate before being sent to Trump, has angered Beijing and further strained an already testy relationship.

Several sources familiar with Beijing's stance told Reuters that the bill could jeopardise the so-called phase one trade deal already fraught with disagreements and complications.

With a new round of US tariffs on Chinese goods scheduled to take effect in less than two weeks, the possibility of

another breakdown is growing.

"Do you think if America takes actions to hurt China's interests we won't take any action," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters when asked whether the Uighur bill would affect the trade negotiations. "I think any wrong words and deeds must pay the due price."

Negotiators have continued to work on the trade deal. But sources familiar with the talks say the two sides are still wrangling over the details including whether existing US tariffs on Chinese goods will be removed and how much in additional US agricultural products China will buy.

Bloomberg reported yesterday that Washington and Beijing are "moving closer" to agreeing on how much tariffs would be rolled back in an initial trade deal despite the Hong Kong and Xinjiang issues, citing people familiar with the talks.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross told CNBC on Tuesday that staff-level trade negotiations with China were continuing but no high-level trade talks had been scheduled.



Kamala Harris ends 2020
White House bid

Democrat trailblazer Kamala Harris pulled the plug on her US presidential campaign Tuesday after a promising start to her bid was eroded by underperforming in a crowded field and a failure to raise sufficient funds. The exit of the progressive senator leaves 15 candidates in the battle to see who challenges President Donald Trump in the November 2020 election. Harris has been a fierce Trump critic, repeatedly calling for his impeachment. He reacted to her withdrawal by tweeting, "Too bad. We will miss you" -- to which Harris quickly replied, "Don't worry, Mr. President. I'll see you at your trial." Her departure, following weeks of campaign turmoil, shines a light on the disruptive potential of a self-funding candidate like billionaire Mike Bloomberg.

November 2019 was joint
hottest on record: data

Last month was the joint hottest November in history, satellite data showed yesterday, marking six consecutive months where the world either broke or equalled record temperatures. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service said global temperatures were 0.64 Celsius warmer than the November average from 1981-2010, and equal to the same month in 2015 and 2016. With the exception of the eastern United States and Canada and parts of central Asia, most land mass saw above average temperatures last month. Europe's autumn (September-November) was 1.1C hotter than the historical average, Copernicus said. The World Meteorological Organization said it was virtually certain that the 2010s had been the hottest decade in history.

Chidambaram bailed

Indian ex-finance minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, 73, was granted bail yesterday, 106 days after his dramatic arrest on corruption charges that he says are part of a government witch-hunt against political opponents. Congress had earlier described Chidambaram's arrest in August by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as a "shameless witch-hunt" by BJP's government. Chidambaram, a wealthy lawyer from a land-owning family from Tamil Nadu state, served twice as finance minister and once as home minister during Manmohan Singh's 2004-14 tenure as premier. He is accused of receiving bribes, money-laundering and of illegally approving the acquisition of a telecommunications firm by a Malaysian company.

SOURCE: AFP

FUND FOR TACKLING HUMANITARIAN CRISES

UN seeks \$29b

Says 168m will need help in 2020

AFP, Geneva

The UN launched a humanitarian appeal for nearly \$29 billion yesterday as climate change and increasingly protracted conflicts put tens of millions of people in urgent need of aid.

The world body's Global Humanitarian Overview estimated that 168 million people worldwide will need some form of emergency assistance in 2020, including food, shelter and healthcare.

That figure marks a "record in the modern era," UN emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock told reporters, clarifying that he was referring to the period since World War II.

Needs continue to rise in part because "conflicts are becoming more protracted and intense," Lowcock said.

"Combatants display total disregard for humanitarian law," with the result that civilians caught up in conflict are increasingly likely to be displaced or traumatised psychologically, he said, adding that the number of attacks on schools and health facilities continues to rise.

In addition, climate change has unleashed more extreme weather events, notably drought and flooding, which trigger humanitarian emergencies, he said.

"The brutal truth is that 2020 will be difficult for millions of people," Lowcock said.

Of the 168 million people who are expected to require assistance next year, the \$28.8 billion (26 billion euro) UN appeal is targeting the 109 million who are most in need and whom UN agencies are in a position to help.

The UN is seeking more than \$3 billion to address humanitarian crises in Yemen and Syria, the countries most in need.



PHOTO: AFP

A police officer removes burning effigies that were set on fire by Activists from the All Assam Students Union (AASU) during a protest against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, a bill approved by India's cabinet to give citizenship to religious minorities persecuted in neighboring Muslim countries, in Guwahati, Assam, yesterday.

Natural gas drives record CO2
emissions in 2019

Coal usage falls significantly; floods may uproot 50m a year

AGENCIES

Global carbon emissions boosted by soaring natural gas use are set to hit record levels in 2019 despite a decline in coal consumption and a string of countries declaring a climate emergency, researchers said yesterday.

In its annual analysis of fossil fuel trends, the Global Carbon Project said CO2 emissions were on course to rise 0.6 percent this year -- slower than previous years but still a world away from what is needed to keep global warming in check.

In three peer-reviewed studies, authors attributed the rise to "robust growth" in natural gas and oil, which offset significant falls in coal use in the United States and Europe.

Atmospheric CO2 levels, which have been climbing exponentially in recent decades, are expected to hit an average of 410 parts per million this year, Le Quere said. That's the highest level in at least 800,000 years.

The report will make for further uncomfortable reading for delegates gathered at UN climate talks in Madrid,

with the warnings from the world's top climate scientists still ringing in their ears.

Last week the UN said global emissions needed to fall 7.6 percent each year, every year, to 2030 to stand any chance of limiting temperature rises to 1.5C. With just 1C of warming since the industrial era so far,



2019 saw a string of deadly superstorms, drought, wildfires and flooding.

The report anticipated emissions falls of 1.7 percent in the US and Europe as the power sector continues its switch away from coal. The most polluting fossil fuel saw its usage drop by as much as 10 percent

in the two regions this year, the report said.

But such savings were offset globally by the likes of India and China, the biggest overall emitter, and specifically by an increase in energy from natural gas.

"Compared to coal, natural gas is a cleaner fossil fuel, but unabated natural gas use merely cooks the planet more slowly than coal," said Glen Peters, research director at the CICERO Center for International Climate Research.

Meanwhile, the number of people at risk of being forced from their homes by river flooding could surge to as many as 50 million a year by the end of the century if governments do not step up action to tackle climate change, researchers warned.

That would be five times the average of 10 million displaced a year from the mid-1970s to 2005, and would happen as populations grow and as rainfall intensifies and ice melts on a warmer planet, causing more frequent and severe floods, said study author Justin Ginnetti.

AFGHANISTAN SHOOTING

Japanese doctor,
five others killed

REUTERS, Kabul

Gunmen yesterday killed six people, including the head of a Japanese aid agency, in an attack on their vehicle in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan, officials said.

The ambush comes a week after a grenade attack on a United Nations vehicle in Kabul heightened fears for those doing humanitarian work amid one of the world's longest-running conflicts.

Tetsu Nakamura, head of Peace Japan Medical Services, had been involved in rebuilding Afghan irrigation and agriculture and had recently been granted honorary Afghan citizenship for decades of humanitarian work in the east of the country.

"I am shocked that he had to die in this way," Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a news conference in Tokyo.

"He risked his life in a dangerous environment to do various work, and the people of Afghanistan were very grateful to him," Abe added.

The gunmen fled the scene and police have launched a search operation to arrest them, Sohrab Qaderi, a member of the governing council in the province of Nangarhar told Reuters, adding he believed Nakamura had been targeted for his work.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, but Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Afghan Taliban, said the militant group was not involved in the shooting.