

NEWS IN
briefEgypt road accidents
kill 28 workers, tourists

AFP, Cairo

At least 28 people including textile workers and several Asian tourists were killed Saturday in two separate road crashes in Egypt, official media and other sources said. The deadliest accident occurred when a bus transporting textile workers collided with a car on the road between the cities of Port Said and Damietta in northern Egypt, state-run Al-Ahram newspaper said on its website. At least 22 men and women who worked for a clothing factory were killed and eight others injured, the report said.

Yemen missile strike
kills five separatists

AFP, Aden

A missile struck a passing out ceremony in southern Yemen yesterday, killing at least five southern separatists, security officials said. The ceremony in the town of Ad-Dali was for new recruits to the separatist-dominated Security Belt Forces, a formation trained and equipped by the United Arab Emirates to patrol territory retaken from northern rebels or al-Qaeda, its spokesman Majed al-Shuaib said.

Two killed, 7 hurt in
Texas shooting

AFP, Houston

A shooting killed two people and wounded at least seven while they were filming a music video in the US state of Texas, authorities said Saturday. "We are now at 9 total gunshot wound victims. 2 were confirmed deceased at scene, 1 was critical, the others remain hospitalized," Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez tweeted. The attack on a group of Hispanic men in their 20s occurred around 9:30 pm Friday (0330 GMT Saturday) at a parking lot in a residential Houston neighbourhood.

STALLED TALKS WITH US
N Korea's Kim holds top party meeting

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has convened a key meeting of top ruling party officials, state media said yesterday, ahead of a year-end deadline for Washington to shift its stance on stalled nuclear talks.

The plenary session, which opened on Saturday, follows widespread speculation that Pyongyang is preparing to test an intercontinental ballistic missile -- as a threatened "Christmas gift" for Washington.

Kim presided over the meeting which discussed a new "transparent, anti-imperialist independent stand", the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The ruling Workers' Party of Korea will also "discuss important matters arising... in the building of the state and national defence", KCNA added.

Talks on denuclearising the Korean peninsula have been largely deadlocked since the second summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump collapsed in Hanoi at the start of this year.

The opening of the plenary comes a week after Kim held a meeting of top defence officials and discussed boosting military capabilities, and ahead of the leader's New Year speech on January 1, a key political set-piece in the isolated country.

Pyongyang has carried out a series of static tests at its Sohae rocket facility this month.



Demonstrators have their eyes covered with a patch during a protest to show solidarity with the Jamia Millia Islamia University student who allegedly lost his eye during protests against new citizenship law, in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Alone and crying' China sends 5 lakh Muslim kids to boarding schools

Toi, Hotan

The first grader was a good student and beloved by her classmates, but she was inconsolable, and it was no mystery to her teacher why. "The girl is often slumped over on the table alone and crying," he wrote on his blog.

"When I asked around, I learned that it was because she missed her mother." The mother, he noted, had been sent to a detention camp for Muslim ethnic minorities. The girl's father had passed away, he added. But instead of letting other relatives raise her, the authorities put her in a state-run boarding school — one of hundreds of such facilities that have opened in China's Xinjiang region.

As many as a million ethnic Uighurs, Kazakhs and others have been sent to internment camps and prisons in Xinjiang over the past three years, a clampdown aimed at weakening the population's devotion to Islam. The Chinese government is pressing ahead with a parallel effort targeting the region's children.

Nearly a half million children have been separated from their families and placed in boarding schools so far, according to a planning document published on a government website, and the ruling Communist Party has

set a goal of operating one to two such schools in each of Xinjiang's 800-plus townships by the end of next year.

The party has presented the schools as a way to fight poverty, arguing that they make it easier for kids to attend classes if their parents live or work in remote areas or are unable to care for them. But the schools are also designed to assimilate and indoctrinate kids at an early age, away from the influence of families, according to the document, published in 2017.

The schools are off limits to outsiders and tightly guarded. State media and official documents describe education as a key component of President Xi Jinping's campaign to wipe out extremist violence in Xinjiang. But a troubling picture of these institutions emerges from interviews with Uighur parents (UAE) and Jordan.

Living in exile and a review of documents published online, including procurement records, government notices, state media reports and the blogs of teachers in the schools.

State media and official documents describe education as a key component of President Xi Jinping's campaign to wipe out extremist violence in Xinjiang, a ruthless and far-reaching effort that also includes mass internment camps and sweeping surveillance measures.



XINJIANG CRACKDOWN



Iraqi university students take part in an anti-government demonstration in the holy shrine city of Najaf yesterday. The youth-led protests demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the country in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Demonstrators have vented their fury at what they consider inept politicians who have mismanaged the economy, enriched themselves and are beholden to powerful neighbour Iran.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump retweets name of Ukraine whistleblower Faces staunch criticism from Democrats

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump retweeted an attack that included an unsubstantiated name of the intelligence community whistleblower at the heart of the Ukraine scandal as part of a series of rants and conspiratorial posts Friday night and faced staunch criticism.

On Saturday morning, the retweeted message was no longer visible to some Twitter users. It appeared, for most of the day, that Trump or someone with access to his account had removed the controversial retweet. Most of Friday night's other posts, including pro-Trump and anti-Democrat memes from suspicious-looking Twitter accounts, also appeared to be missing.

The White House did not respond to CNN's request for comment on Friday night's retweet and what appeared to be Saturday morning's reversal, even after other news outlets reported Trump had

removed the post.

It turned out that a Twitter glitch was hiding those retweets and lots of others. The company did not explain this when CNN made inquiries Saturday morning, apparently because the glitch was being investigated.

Twitter explained the software bug in a statement Saturday night, saying: "Due to an outage with one of our systems, tweets on account profiles were visible to some, but not others. We're still working on fixing this and apologize for any confusion."

A Twitter spokesman confirmed that Trump's account was affected by the bug, along with millions of other accounts.

In response to his retweet on Saturday, attorney Stephen Kohn, an expert in whistleblower protection laws, told the Washington Post that the president was violating his duty to safeguard whistleblowers, reports BBC.



SPANISH THEATRE STABBING Saudi sentences Yemeni to death

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi criminal court yesterday sentenced a Yemeni man to death for a knife attack on a Spanish theatre group performing in Riyadh last month, state television said.

The court also sentenced an accomplice to 12 years and six months in jail for the November 11 attack which Riyadh has linked to militant group Al-Qaeda, and which Madrid said left four performers wounded.

"The criminal court issues a preliminary ruling handing the death sentence to the perpetrator of the terrorist attack... in Riyadh," the official Al-Ekhbariya television reported.

The assailant, identified by Saudi police as a 33-year-old Yemeni, went on a stabbing spree during a live musical in the capital's King Abdullah Park, one of the venues hosting the two-month "Riyadh Season" entertainment festival.

Last week, Al-Ekhbariya said the attacker took orders from an al-Qaeda leader in Yemen, but so far there has been no claim of responsibility from the group.

Al-Ekhbariya did not offer any details on his alleged accomplice. Saudi Arabia is leading a military coalition supporting the Yemeni government against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels and has also been involved in the fight against al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is active in Yemen, is considered by the United States as the radical group's most dangerous branch.

5 stabbed at NY home of rabbi

Suspect taken into custody; governor calls incident an 'act of terrorism'

AP, New York

An intruder stabbed and wounded five people at a rabbi's house in New York during a gathering to celebrate the Jewish festival of Hanukkah late Saturday, officials and media reports said.

The victims were taken to hospitals near the New York suburb of Monsey, two in critical condition, the Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council (OJPAC) tweeted after receiving a call at 9:50 pm.

"5 patients with stab wounds, all Hasidic, were transported to local hospitals."

Local police departments, speaking to AFP, declined to give the number of people injured, but a suspect has been taken into custody and a vehicle safeguarded, an NYPD spokesman said.

Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, said he was "horrified" by the "despicable and cowardly act", and had directed the State Police hate crimes task force to investigate.

"This is an act of terrorism. I think these are domestic terrorists. They are trying to inflict fear," New Cuomo told reporters.

CBS New York reported that a man brandishing a machete went into the rabbi's property in Rockland County, and knifed at least three people before fleeing.

"I was praying for my life," said witness Aron Kohn, 65, according to the New York Times, comparing the knife used by the attacker to "the size of a broomstick".

Kohn also threw chairs and tables in an attempt to head off the attacker, he told CNN.

Turkey speeds up deal to prevent slide into 'chaos'

Greece 'wants a say' in peace process: PM

AGENCIES

Turkey's foreign minister warned that the Libyan conflict risks sliding into chaos and becoming the next Syria, as he sought to speed up legislation to allow it to send troops to the North African country.

Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli has been struggling to fend off General Khalifa Haftar's forces, which have been supported by Russia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan.

"If today Libya becomes like Syria, then the turn will come for the other countries in the region," Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Saturday at a meeting of the governing AK Party.

He stressed the military and security deal

signed with Libya is important. Last week, President Tayyip Erdogan announced his government's decision to seek a parliamentary consent to send troops to Libya to defend the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli against General Khalifa Haftar forces which receives military support from Russia, Egypt and United Arab Emirates, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said yesterday Greece wants to be included in UN-sponsored talks in January on the Libya conflict, as tensions escalate with neighbours Turkey over the issue, reports AFP.

Libya has become another diplomatic front for Greece and Turkey as traditional rivals jostle over Mediterranean maritime rights and the competing camps in the North African country's conflict.

Mayawati suspends MLA over citizenship law

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, who has been a vocal critic of the amended Citizenship Act, has suspended a party MLA for supporting the law amid widespread protests across the country. "If discipline is broken, immediate action is taken against MPs and MLAs of the party," she tweeted yesterday. On Saturday, BSP MLA Ramabai Parihar supported the new citizenship law at an event in her constituency - Patharia in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district - where Union Minister Prahad Patel was also present. "I congratulate (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi, Prahad Patel and Amit Shah for the smooth passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). It's a great decision which should have been taken much before..." she said.

Saudi Arabia to host OIC meet on Kashmir

In a move that could impact ties with India, Saudi Arabia has agreed to hold a special foreign ministers' meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) devoted to Kashmir after it persuaded Pakistan to back out of an Islamic summit hosted by Malaysia last week. The gesture by the kingdom was reportedly conveyed to the Pakistani government during Saudi foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud's visit to Islamabad this week. It was a concession secured by Pakistan to compensate for PM Imran Khan being compelled by Saudi Arabia to pull out of a meeting on Islamic issues chaired by Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur.

Barack Obama lists his favourite books of 2019

Former US President Barack Obama on Saturday continued his tradition of sharing his annual lists of favourites, starting with a rundown of books that made the past year "a little brighter for me." "This has become a fun little tradition for me, and I hope it is for you, too," Obama wrote in an Instagram post. Similar to previous years, Obama's book picks are a mix of historic non-fiction and some literary novels. It includes the "Lost Children Archive," which is about the migrant crisis; the Sally Rooney novel "Normal People," which is being adapted for a Hulu series; and "The Topeka School," which explores white male identity.

SOURCE: NDTV, CNN, TOI