

ELSEWHERE

**Fire at Imran Khan's office causes evacuation**

ISLAMABAD
A fire broke out at Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's Office on Monday, triggering evacuation, according to a report. The fire broke out on the sixth floor of the building and Mr. Khan was reportedly one floor below in a meeting, *The Express Tribune* reported. It was later contained and a police official said an electrical short circuit may have caused the incident. PTI

Air strike forces closure of Tripoli airport

TRIPOLI
Fighting raged around Tripoli and an air strike closed its only functioning airport on Monday, as Libyan commander, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, defied international calls to halt his advance on the capital. Thousands were also reported by the UN to be fleeing the capital city in face of Field Marshal Haftar's surprise assault which has left dozens dead. AFP

U.S. Homeland Security chief resigns

She oversaw the 'zero tolerance' policy on migration, which led to separation of children from parents

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen resigned on Sunday evening, according to reports. Ms. Nielsen will, however, stay on until April 10 after which Kevin McAleenan, the current Customs and Border Protection Commissioner, will take charge as Acting Homeland Security Secretary.

Ms. Nielsen, who has had a rocky working relationship with President Donald Trump, handed in her resignation at a time when there were growing signs of division within the administration over how to handle the swelling numbers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

2,700 children separated

Ms. Nielsen, 46, was appointed to her role in December 2017. She will be remembered most for her role in overseeing the "zero tolerance" policy towards migrants crossing the border, which resulted in the separation of more than 2,700 children from their parents. Ms.

Nielsen had initially resisted the move, advocated by Mr. Trump, but weeks later, in the spring of 2018, made a choice to sign a memo bringing to life a policy that was widely seen as an inhumane.

Images and reports – including from lawmakers – surfaced showing disused warehouses being used as detention centres, with children being kept in cage-like enclosures, sleeping on floors on mattresses and foil blankets.

Two children died in custody at the border in 2018, and a third minor, a 19-month-old baby, died a few weeks after being released from a detention centre.

"Nielsen will go down in history as presiding over an exceptionally cruel regime that separated families and violated human rights," Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal tweeted. "I welcome her resignation and believe she should be held accountable for the abuses that happened under her watch."

Mr. McAleenan was among those who had en-



U.S. President Donald Trump with Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen in California. • REUTERS

couraged Ms. Nielsen to sign the family separation memo in 2018, *The New York Times* reported. In June last year, a judge had ordered that separations under most circumstances would not be permitted and that separated children had to be reunited with their parents.

However, almost 250 families have been separated since – without violating the June order, the government

claimed in February this year.

Ms. Nielsen was grilled in March by a U.S. House of Representatives committee on the border situation, and questioned repeatedly on whether the enclosures in which children were held were significantly different from dog cages.

The Secretary, who posted her resignation letter on Twitter, hit out at Congress

and the courts in the document. "I hope the next Secretary will have the support of Congress and the courts in fixing the laws which have impeded our ability to fully secure America's borders and which have contributed to discord in our nation's discourse," she wrote.

Ms. Nielsen had a complicated working relationship with Mr. Trump – she was often berated for not being tough enough and alternated between resisting some of Mr. Trump's more outlandish policy requests and first capitulating, then defending the administration's policies.

The dissonance between Mr. Trump and Ms. Nielsen had become particularly pronounced as the Secretary struggled to keep up with his agenda.

Some 58,000 migrants were apprehended at the border in January and some 1,00,000 in March, as per the Department of Homeland Security. The rising numbers – part of a pre-summer surge – have frustrated Mr. Trump.

Sri Lanka seeks enhanced military training from India

Sirisena meets Defence Secretary

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka has sought enhanced military training from India, according to President Maithripala Sirisena's office.

Visiting Indian Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra called on Mr. Sirisena on Monday, and wide-ranging matters, including bilateral defence cooperation between the neighbouring countries and regional security, were discussed, officials said.

"India and Sri Lanka agreed to increase cooperation in security and defence spheres in several areas, including regional security, curbing drug smuggling and human trafficking and training of members of the security forces," a statement from the presidential media unit said.

Thanking India for its partnership, Mr. Sirisena requested to increase the number of personnel trained by India. The Indian Defence Secretary agreed to

look into the possibility of enhancing training facilities, the statement further said.

Currently, over 60% of Sri Lanka's military personnel pursue their young officers' course, junior and senior command courses in India, according to defence sources in Colombo.

Meanwhile, 'Exercise Mitra Shakti', the sixth edition of the joint military training exercise between the Indian Army and the Sri Lankan Army, concluded in Badulla district, in Sri Lanka's Central Province, on Monday.

Contingents from the two countries jointly planned and executed a series of "well-coordinated tactical operations based on scenarios that are likely to be encountered in rural and urban environment", a press release from the Indian Ministry of Defence said. The two-week programme is part of an initiative that began in 2013 as part of military diplomacy between India and Sri Lanka.

U.S. designates Iran's elite military unit as a 'terrorist organisation'

IRGC promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft: Trump

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Monday announced the United States is designating Iran's elite military force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a terrorist organisation.

Mr. Trump said in a statement that the "unprecedented" move "recognises the reality that Iran is not only a state sponsor of terrorism, but that the IRGC actively participates in, finances,

and promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft." The IRGC was formed after the 1979 revolution with a mission to defend the clerical regime.

Addressing reporters following Mr. Trump's announcement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned all banks and business of consequences to dealing with the Revolutionary Guards.

"The leaders of Iran are racketeers, not revolutionaries," Mr. Pompeo said. "Businesses and banks around the

world now have a clear duty to ensure that companies with which they conduct financial transactions are not conducted with the IRGC in any material way."

In retaliation, Iran's Supreme National Security Council declared the U.S. a "state sponsor of terrorism" and U.S. forces in the region "terrorist groups", the country's state media said.

It also slammed Washington's move as an "illegal and foolish act".

Modi congratulates Solih on MDP's landslide win

Prime Minister reiterates India's 'neighbourhood first' policy in deepening the bilateral partnership

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to wish him on his party's landslide victory in the recent parliamentary election.

A statement from Mr. Solih's office said Mr. Modi "personally called" on Monday, "to congratulate him on his party's exceptionally strong performance" in the Maldives's Majlis election, in which the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) secured

65 of 87 seats, securing a significant majority in Parliament.

Mr. Modi said the poll outcome was indicative of "the high level of trust and support" that Maldivian citizens had vested in their government and its policy priorities. "He [Mr. Modi] further conveyed his full confidence that the Maldives government can deliver on their promises towards the Maldivian people in the upcoming five years, and that the Indian government will always stand ready to be of assis-



Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. • AP

tance to the Maldives," the statement said.

An official press release from the Ministry of External Affairs said, "The Prime Minister reiterated India's deep commitment in keeping with

its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, to work closely with the Maldives in further deepening the partnership and assist the Maldives as per the latter's requirement in its socio-economic development."

PM speaks to Nasheed

Former President and prominent MDP leader Mohamed Nasheed, who won a seat in capital Male and made a political comeback, later tweeted: "Had the pleasure of speaking today with Indian Prime Minister @narendramodi, and yesterday

with External Affairs Minister @SushmaSwaraj. I assured them we will use our Majlis majority responsibly: implement manifesto pledges; consolidate democracy; ensure Indian Ocean stability."

New Delhi has been watching developments in Male closely, as it tries to renew ties with the neighbour after the relationship turned increasingly hostile during the Abdulla Yameen administration.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee)