

ELSEWHERE



Ramaphosa announces gender-balanced Cabinet

JOHANNESBURG
South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Wednesday cut the number of Cabinet Ministers from 36 to 28, in a move he said would tackle the country's "bloated" government. Half the new ministers are women, making South Africa one of the world's few gender-balanced governments. AFP

Madrasas asked to appoint woman mentors

DHAKA
Bangladesh has ordered state-funded Islamic seminars to appoint woman mentors to prevent violence against women and children, an official said Thursday, after at least 16 people were charged with the murder of a teenage student. Saif Ullah, head of the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board said they have ordered each madrasa to appoint a "woman mentor". AFP

White House asked Navy to hide warship *John S. McCain*: report

President, Defense Secretary deny issuing such order

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday that he "couldn't care less" whether a U.S. Navy destroyer bears the name of late Senator John McCain, but insisted he would not have ordered hiding the vessel from view during his Japan trip.

U.S. media reported that efforts were made to obscure the *USS John S. McCain*'s name during Mr. Trump's visit to an Ameri-

Netanyahu fails to form government

Israeli lawmakers vote to dissolve Parliament; PM proposes to hold election on September 17

REUTERS
JERUSALEM

Israeli lawmakers voted to dissolve Parliament on Thursday, paving the way for a new election after veteran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a coalition government before a midnight deadline.

Mr. Netanyahu preferred a new ballot, set for September 17, to the alternative, under which President Reuven Rivlin could have asked another politician to try and form a ruling coalition.

But the need to go the polls again so soon, after a closely contested April 9 election in which Mr. Netanyahu had claimed victory, showed a new measure of weakness by a leader in power for the past decade who has for many become the face of Israel.

Three graft cases

Potential indictments in three corruption cases have only deepened questions about his political survival.

"We will win," Mr. Net-



Back to poll mode: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Knesset on Thursday. REUTERS

anyahu, 69, head of the right-wing Likud party, vowed after Parliament voted when the deadline expired for him to assemble his fifth government. However, he was looking over his shoulder at the Likud benches during the vote in what some commentators interpreted as concern about any last-minute revolt. Not a single Likud lawmaker wavered in voting for an election.

With coalition-building potentially stretching into November after the new ballot, the uncertainty seems likely to delay further U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Military conscription

The crisis arose – officially, at least – from a feud over military conscription between Mr. Netanyahu's pres-

umed allies: ex-Defence Minister and far-right secularist Avigdor Lieberman, and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties.

Those parties want young religious scholars exempted from mandatory national service. But Mr. Lieberman and many other Israelis say they should share the burden.

Faced with the prospect of having to step aside at the end of a 42-day period to put together a government, Mr. Netanyahu instead drummed up support to dissolve the Knesset.

Mr. Netanyahu cast Mr. Lieberman, a settler in the occupied West Bank, as a leftist for effectively blocking creation of a right-wing administration and said his erstwhile ally had been out to topple him.

"The man from Caesarea is accusing the man from Yisrael Beiteinu party, asked at a news conference, naming the beachside suburb in where Mr. Netanyahu has a

home and the settlement where he lives.

In Jerusalem, the White House team behind the Trump proposal, including his son-in-law Jared Kushner, held talks with Mr. Netanyahu but made no public comment about any time frame for release of the plan.

"Even though we had a little event last night," Mr. Netanyahu said, referring to the vote in Parliament, "that's not going to stop us – we're going to keep working together."

The group is in West Asia to drum up support for what Mr. Kushner styles as an economic workshop in Bahrain next month to encourage investment in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Even before it has been announced, Palestinians have spurned the plan – described by Mr. Trump as "the deal of the century" – as a blow to their statehood hopes. "Now it is the deal of the next century," Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat told Israel Radio.

7 South Koreans perish as boat sinks in Budapest

Hunt for missing tourists continues

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BUDAPEST

Seven South Korean tourists died and 21 others are missing after a sightseeing boat sank in driving rain on the Danube river in the heart of Budapest, officials said on Thursday.

The boat capsized near the Parliament building in the Hungarian capital after a collision with a larger cruise boat on Wednesday evening, officials and media reports said. Army divers joined police in the hunt for survivors, which continued through the night.

Heavy rainfall

The search operation has been extended the length of the Danube in Hungary, officials said, as weeks of heavy rainfall has led to high water levels and a fast-moving current, complicating rescue efforts. Local media reported that one body was found several kilometres south of the site of the sinking.

A total of 33 South Ko-



A rescue boat in the Danube river on Thursday. REUTERS

reans, including 30 tourists and three guides, were on board the *Mermaid*, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said, confirming the seven dead were South Korean.

The youngest on board was a six-year-old girl, travel agency officials said. The 26-m boat was also carrying two Hungarian crew members when it went down at 9.15 p.m. local time.

A witness told the Index.hu news site that the *Mermaid*, which could carry up to 60 people, had been hit from behind by a large cruise boat.

Impeachment is a dirty, disgusting word: Trump

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday rejected talk among Democrats about the possibility of launching an impeachment inquiry against him in the aftermath of the Russia probe, saying he did nothing to merit such an outcome.

Talking to reporters on the White House South Lawn ahead of a trip to Colorado, Mr. Trump grew animated in reacting to a statement from U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller on Wednesday.

Asked if he expected to be impeached, Mr. Trump said: "I don't see how... It's a dirty, filthy, disgusting word... It's a giant presidential harassment."

He cited the U.S. Constitution's language that a President can be charged with "high crimes and misdemeanors."

"There was no crime. There was no misdemeanor," he said.

Mr. Trump heaped scorn on Mr. Mueller, calling him conflicted. "I think Mueller is a true 'never Trumper'," said Mr. Trump.

China accuses the U.S. of 'naked economic terrorism'

We are not afraid of a trade war, says Vice-Foreign Minister

REUTERS
BEIJING

Provoking trade disputes is "naked economic terrorism", a senior Chinese diplomat said on Thursday, ramping up the rhetoric against the U.S. amid a bitter trade war that is showing no signs of ending soon.

Trade tensions between Washington and Beijing escalated sharply earlier this month after the Trump administration accused China of having "reneged" on its

previous promises to make structural changes to its economic practices.

Washington later slapped additional tariffs of up to 25% on \$200 billion of Chinese goods, prompting Beijing to retaliate.

Speaking to reporters in Beijing, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Hanhui said China opposed the use of "big sticks" like trade sanctions, tariffs and protectionism. "We oppose a trade war but are not afraid of a

trade war. This kind of deliberately provoking trade disputes is naked economic terrorism, economic homicide, economic bullying," Mr. Zhang said, when asked about the trade war.

Everyone loses in a trade war, he added, addressing a briefing on Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Russia next week, where he will meet President Vladimir Putin and speak at a major investor forum in St. Petersburg.

Indian dies after setting himself on fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

A 33-year-old Indian man died after reportedly setting himself ablaze near the White House, police said on Thursday.

Arnav Gupta from Bethesda, Maryland, died of burn injuries after he set himself on fire on Wednesday at the Ellipse, a public park near the White House.

Once the flames were extinguished, Mr. Gupta was rushed to a local hospital for treatment but died on Thursday morning, the United States Park Police said in a statement.

Police said Mr. Gupta was reported missing by his family since Wednesday morning. The authorities then put out a notice asking for the public's help in finding him.

Assange's U.S. extradition hearing moved to June on health grounds

His condition deteriorated during time in prison: WikiLeaks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Britain's review of a U.S. request to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on espionage charges has been moved to June, with his lawyer telling court on Thursday the whistleblower is in poor health.

The United States has slapped 18 charges against Mr. Assange, 47, who had been hiding in London's Ecuadorian Embassy for seven years until his arrest on April 12.

Sweden has since reopened a 2010 rape investigation against Mr. Assange and could file its own extradition request.

The Westminster Magistrates Court in London held a brief hearing on Thursday at which it moved the U.S.



A protest outside the Westminster Magistrates Court on Thursday. AFP

case to June 12. Chief magistrate Emma Arbuthnot referred to Mr. Assange as "not very well", with the next hearing possibly taking place at the Belmarsh prison where he is serving a separate 50-week sentence for skipping bail.

"It may be more convenient for everyone if it's

there," Ms. Arbuthnot said. WikiLeaks expressed "grave concerns" on Wednesday over Mr. Assange's condition.

Moved to health ward

The website said Mr. Assange has been moved to the prison's health ward. "During the seven weeks in Belmarsh his health has continued to deteriorate and he has dramatically lost weight," WikiLeaks said in a statement. "The decision of prison authorities to move him to the health ward speaks for itself."

Sixteen of the 17 U.S. charges under the Espionage Act are related to obtaining and disseminating classified information. A separate count covers his alleged hacking activities.

Six killed in attack at Kabul military academy

Blast was claimed by the Islamic State

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

At least six people were killed and 16 more wounded in a suicide blast outside a military academy in the Afghan capital on Thursday, an official said.

The attack, which was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group, targeted students leaving the Marshal Fahim National Defense University in western Kabul.

Kabul police spokesman Firdaws Faramarz said the suicide bomber had been on foot. He blew himself up when a soldier challenged him near the entrance to the war college. "In the blast, 16 people were wounded and six were martyred," Mr. Faramarz said.

The attacker "detonated himself before reaching his



An Afghan security forces member at the site of Thursday's blast. REUTERS

target", he added. The Afghan IS affiliate said it had carried out the attack and claimed to have killed "50 military trainees".

Opened in 2005 and named after former Vice-President Mohammed Fahim, the Marshal Fahim academy is modelled after U.S. and British war colleges and trains cadets destined to become officers in Afghanistan's Army.

Pak. Pashtun MP held over clash with military

Dawar had led protests in N. Waziristan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PESHAWAR

A Pakistani parliamentarian and civil rights leader linked to a violent weekend clash between Pashtun activists and security forces was taken into custody on Thursday, officials said.

Moshin Dawar – an MP and leading member of the Pashtun Protection Movement (PTM) – had been in hiding for days following the fatal incident on Sunday in North Waziristan, where he was leading a protest against alleged abuses by the military. "He has been charged with murder, attempted murder, attacking law enforcement personnel, disturbing law and order, and terrorism," said an official in Bannu.

Mr. Dawar is the second

MP to be arrested in connection with the clash after PTM leader Ali Wazir was taken into custody on Sunday.

The military said at least three activists were shot dead in the incident after protesters attacked their checkpoint. The PTM disputed that, saying at least 13 people were killed after security forces fired into an unarmed crowd.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday demanded a "prompt, transparent, and impartial investigation by Pakistani authorities".

The clash follows months of rising tensions between the two sides, with the military publicly warning PTM leaders to end their criticism of Pakistan's armed forces' conduct during their fight against militancy.